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ABSTRACT

This study looked at attitudes toward "school leavers," young people aged 15 to 19 who left school after August, 1975, to enter the workforce and who have never studied full time for an extended period at a postsecondary institution. Data were collected through interviews with employers in Western Australia. As well as uncovering a number of findings about employer expectations and hiring practices, the study found a number of areas in which employers indicated dissatisfaction with school leavers. Although most employers considered that school leavers adequately met their requirements, they felt that young people lacked the qualities of industriousness, application, responsibility, self-discipline, motivation, respect and courtesy towards others. The leavers' communication skills were also considered unsatisfactory. Employers also felt that young people need to be better informed about job choices, what jobs they preferred and were suited to, and what would be expected of them in employment. Finally, the employers surveyed felt that the schools have a responsibility to try to improve students' verbal skill, attitudes toward work, and knowledge of the world of work. The employer surveys and questionnaires used in the study are reproduced in the appendix. (Author/JM)

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ATTITUDES OF EMPLOYERS TO SCHOOL LEAVERS
IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

J. Williams and T.A. Priest

A project conducted jointly by the
University of Western Australia and
the Education Department of Western
Australia

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FOREWORD

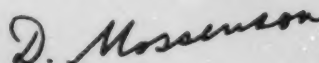
This is a report on the attitudes of employers to school leavers in Perth, Western Australia. It comprises a detailed analysis of the responses of more than 350 employers to a survey designed to ascertain their expectations and perceptions of young people seeking to enter the work-force on leaving school.

The project has been a joint venture of the Education Department of Western Australia and the Department of Education of the University of Western Australia, under a project committee chaired by Professor T.A. Priest. Other members of the committee were Dr S. King, Professor P. Tannock and Mr D. Tomlinson from the University of Western Australia, and Mr M. Angus, Mr T. Beck, Mr K. Catterall and Mr J. Ryall from the Education Department of Western Australia. Mrs J. Williams, a member of the Education Department made available to the University as Project Officer, was the executive officer of the Committee.

The report has been prepared by Mrs Williams. She was assisted by members of the University department, in particular Dr S. King, Mr D. Tomlinson, Mrs V. Bishara and Miss L. Denton.

To all these persons, and to the many employers who participated in the survey, I extend my sincere thanks.

Current concern over the problems facing young people in finding employment when they leave school, and public comment and differences of opinion on the appropriate role of the school in this connection, make this report timely. I hope that it will be the forerunner of a number of studies designed to provide us with the facts necessary for forward planning of appropriate school programmes in this area.



D. Mossenson
Director-General of Education
December, 1978.

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1.1 THE STUDY

This study was an exploratory survey of a dimension of the school-work interface, namely employer expectations and perceptions of school leavers.

Its specific purpose was to survey a sample of employers in the Perth metropolitan area, using questionnaire and interviews, to ascertain

- (i) employer expectations of school leavers entering employment;
- (ii) employer perceptions of school leaver applicants and young people in employment;
- (iii) employer opinions of the adequacy of some aspects of schooling;
- (iv) employer opinions of desirable changes in some aspects of schooling to better equip young people for employment.

Information sought in the survey included general background facts about the employing enterprise; the views of employers on how well the schools are meeting their needs for school leaver employees; what employers want from the schools in improving the preparation of students for employment, and the knowledge, skills and personal characteristics of school leavers as seen by employers.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The suitability of young people for employment is currently receiving considerable attention by the media. This has been highlighted by rising unemployment rates in the community, particularly among 15 - 19 year olds. Education has become an important social and political issue, and public discussion has focused upon several aspects of the link between school and work. In recent years, there has been a trend towards a longer period of formal education, resulting in the deferral of entry of young people into the workforce. Rising retention rates have led to further questioning of the relevance and appropriateness of additional years of schooling. In particular, there has been criticism of the output of schools in terms of the cognitive skills mastered by school leavers. Evidence of the extent of concern with the relationship between school and work is shown by the number of recently initiated inquiries and reports in which there has been a high degree of cooperation between all levels of government and both

employer and union groups.

The 1977 O.E.C.D. report : *Transition from School to Work or Further Study*⁴ characterized this concern as "one aspect of an increasing unease about the social role of schools that has almost completely replaced the heady optimism of the 1960's about the functions of education in economic and social development."

Today, complaints that workers or applicants for jobs "lack even the basic skills" are frequently given publicity.¹ Other complaints refer to the attitudes of young people, including the opinion that many do not want to work even when jobs are available. Labels such as 'dole-bludger' are often applied indiscriminately to all unemployed youth. Underlying these complaints seems to be a feeling that schools are becoming alienated from their communities, and that educational goals are not in harmony with the needs of society. The implication of these criticisms is that the schools are failing to provide young people with the knowledge, skills and attitudes that are necessary for satisfactory employment.

The Schools Commission, in a discussion paper published in September 1977, identified three claims currently made about schools:

- "a. schools tend to be divorced from reality, especially the realities of "the world of work";
- b. schools are failing to provide their students, especially early leavers, with the skills they will need in their working life;
- c. schools should provide curriculum options which are vocationally oriented;"¹

The validity of these criticisms has not been tested. They have gathered momentum, however, as a result of the problem of youth unemployment which has become prominent in this decade. At present, and for Australia as a whole, nearly 40 per cent of those currently unemployed are under 20, although this group comprises only 12 per cent of the labour force.

The problem of unemployment amongst the 15 - 19 age group has two distinct dimensions. The first reflects the severe effects of the present economic recession on unemployment among young people. The second is a structural change. The trend evident since the mid-1960's has been for unemployment

rates among young people to rise more rapidly than adult unemployment rates over the same period.

Cyclical unemployment is seen to be an economic concern which cannot be resolved by the schools - schools cannot create employment. However, awareness of the progressively worsening structural unemployment has reinforced the need to examine the relationship between school and work.

Those critics of schooling who assert that "schools are divorced from reality", appear to argue that the vocational function of schooling has been neglected in recent changes in the curriculum. This vocational function suggests that schools should provide students with essential knowledge and skills which equip them for satisfying and productive employment. But just what are the "essential knowledge and skills" which satisfy the vocational needs of school-leavers? Are those identified by educationists the same as those looked for by employers? Are employers satisfied with the pre-vocational preparation and work attitudes of school-leaver applicants for employment? These questions are central to the present study.

Before proceeding to a review of recent research, it is pertinent to note that just as there are structural changes occurring in youth employment, so too are there structural changes in schooling. First, there is the trend for an increasing number of young people to complete their secondary education. Second, there is an increasing proportion of students proceeding to tertiary education. One result of educational expansion and the consequent deferral of entry of youth to the job market is what has come to be called "credentialism" - that is, the raising of the educational qualifications required by employers for particular jobs, although the content of the jobs has shown little change. For example, the minimum educational standard required for entry to nursing training has risen from the *Junior Certificate* of the Public Examinations Board in the early 1970's to completion of Year 11 in the mid 1970's, and now a satisfactory result in the *Tertiary Admissions Examination* of the Tertiary Institutions Service Centre (Year 12) is required. There are many other examples of this trend. Just what the effect of the increase in the numbers of more highly educated entrants to particular occupations has been, or will be in the future, is not certain.

One consequence for structural unemployment is illustrated in a survey of unemployed young people conducted in September 1975.² That survey revealed

that unemployed youths were predominantly the less educationally qualified, the low-skilled and the inexperienced. Such information provides a useful profile of the young unemployed, but it does little to elucidate the problems related to school and work. Changes in the world of work have significant implications for education, but specific aspects of these implications are largely unknown.

1.3 RECENT RESEARCH

Although there has been considerable recent research in Australia relating to school leavers and employment, questions about the suitability of the education provided in our schools to the employment needs of youth and to the requirements of employers remain largely unanswered. Recent studies have focused on three areas: trends in youth employment; student perceptions of the relevance of their school courses to their vocational aspirations; and, in response to the structural unemployment problems, the needs of youth in the transition from school to employment.

Radford and Wilkes surveyed the occupational destination of school leavers from some primary and all secondary schools throughout Australia for the period 1 April 1971 to 31 March 1972.⁷ Their data provide information about the immediate destination of those who leave school, and, when compared with a similar study undertaken by Radford a decade earlier, information about occupational trends over that period. Other studies have focused upon such issues as occupational choice, vocational guidance and counselling, work-experience programs, and apprenticeship training.²

The most recent Australian studies which have examined some aspects of the link between school learning and the needs of people and the labour market were commissioned by the Australian Government Commission of Inquiry into Poverty.⁵ These focused upon the schooling and employment of young people in situations of socio-economic disadvantage and do not give a broader social perspective.

Others have considered school and work from the point of view of school leavers. Thus Wright and Headlam⁹ used data originally collected for the Commission of Inquiry into Poverty. While schooling and employment prospects formed only one aspect of their study, it documented attitudes of disaffection with schooling across the whole spectrum of young people included in the sample. Poole, in a longitudinal study known as 'The 15 - 18 Year Old

Project,¹⁰ carried out at the School of Education, La Trobe University, found that the over-whelming majority of students wanted a much closer relationship between school and work, more school subjects related to future jobs, and much more vocational guidance and careers information.

Investigations of the role of the school in the wider social process have identified various aspects of the function of schooling in preparing young people for employment.¹¹ Two aspects considered important are: understanding the nature of employment; and fostering attitudes towards work and employment.

Piper¹² established that the development of work values was perceived as "fairly essential" by a sample of academics, educators, and community groups (including parents, trade unionists, employers, and politicians). This was seen by a clear majority of parents and employers in the total sample to be essential learning. However, the report of the survey results did not specify what comprises "a set of work values".

Employers' views on questions such as the relation between education and training, and the labour market, have been documented in the draft submission of the Central Industrial Secretariat to the Commonwealth Inquiry into Education and Training.¹³ That report indicated that while industry does not expect young people entering the workforce direct from secondary school to be able to undertake positions without some period of job familiarisation and training, it is expected that school leavers should have some understanding of what will be required of them when they take up employment. In particular, they should know what they are looking for in a job. Too often it seems that young people have little idea of what they want to do, and that they enter positions for which they are not suited. One result is that industry sustains a much higher labour turnover among young people than among adults. *The Study of Training Needs in South Australia*¹⁴ supported these findings and identified them as contributing factors towards the resistance to employing school leavers.

A survey carried out by the Central Industrial Secretariat¹³ identified four major problems encountered by employers of young people. These are that school leavers:

- (a) lack understanding of the nature and operation of industry and commerce;

- (b) lack understanding and appreciation of what is expected of them and their basic responsibilities upon taking up employment;
- (c) lack skills required in the labour force;
- (d) hold employment expectations beyond their immediate capabilities (and often beyond the capacity of industry and commerce to fulfil).

In addition to these problems, employers expressed concern about their difficulties in assessing the academic qualifications of prospective employees. With the trend toward abolishing external examinations, many employers feel there is a lack of some general benchmark against which to measure the education achievement of job applicants.

There is need for research into the nature of "labour force skills" and their relevance for various occupations. Traditionally, these skills have been seen to be basic levels of literacy and numeracy; that is, the capacity to read with understanding, to write with clarity and precision, and to do simple arithmetic. Even though recent research¹⁵ had indicated that a majority of 10 year-olds and 14 year-olds in Australia have mastered these skills, it is widely claimed that there is a deterioration of standards of literacy and numeracy. The persistence of the criticism suggests that there is a need to determine whether there is harmony between the skills as taught in schools and the skills as applied in the workforce and needed for satisfactory social communication. It should be established, also, whether those criticisms of the basic skills are seen to apply across the whole spectrum of young workers, or whether they apply only to certain categories of workers or applicants for employment. Finally, it is necessary to establish whether there is similar differentiation in the attitudes of young workers. Do the criticisms that young people have unsatisfactory attitudes to work apply across the range of school leavers, or are they applicable only to certain categories of workers? The research evidence currently available provides little to enable educational policy-makers to make informed judgements on these questions.

1.4 SOME DEFINITIONS

For the purpose of this survey, the terms "school leaver" and "employer" were defined as follows:-

SCHOOL LEAVER : A young person who -

- (a) had left school (government or non-government) some time after August 1975 to enter the workforce;
- (b) was aged 15 to 19 years;
- (c) had NOT studied full time for an extended period at a post-secondary institution.

Those who had completed a short commercial course, for example, were still regarded as school leavers.

Employers' views were sought on school leavers they were presently employing or had employed over the previous two years. The views of some employers who were not currently employing school leavers were also included as it was not always possible to ascertain in advance whether school leavers were currently employed.

Two categories of EMPLOYER were surveyed:

Medium to large employers : Government and non-government enterprises employing 20 or more personnel. The views of these employers were obtained by questionnaire.

Small employers : Government and non-government enterprises employing fewer than 20 personnel. The views of the majority of these employers were obtained by personal interview.

The employers were also classified by the type and main purpose of their enterprise; thus:

Type of enterprise:

- Private employer
- Commonwealth Government
- State Government
- Local Government
- Other (mostly government funded enterprises operating as autonomous bodies such as tertiary institutions, hospitals and statutory boards).

Main purpose of enterprise :

According to the classification used in the Australian Standard Industrial Classification of the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Local, statewide, national and international enterprises were included in the sample

1.5 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

A summary of the findings of the study is given below. Detailed discussion and analysis of the results of the survey follow in the remaining chapters.

1. There was a wide variety of recruitment policies and practices, with notable differences between the private and government sectors and between large and small enterprises.

- Private employers, particularly those in small businesses, relied on a personal interview as the major method of selecting school leaver applicants.
- The respective Public Service Boards of the State and Commonwealth Governments usually administer general aptitude tests. Some of the larger private enterprises employ such tests, usually administered by an outside body such as the Counselling Service of the Technical Education Division of the W.A. Education Department.
- All government positions and some positions in private enterprise stipulate specific educational requirements, such as given levels in the *Achievement Certificate* of the Board of Secondary Education, but the requirement depended upon employer preference rather than particular needs for categories of employment.
- There was some lack of employer confidence in school references and reports, and doubts about comparability of standards among schools.
- No preference was expressed for people from particular school backgrounds. The type of school attended, government or non-government, was not identified as influencing employment prospects.

2. There were significant differences between the policies and practices of employers in the private sector and those in the government sector in the training and counselling of young employees.

- Almost three quarters of the employers surveyed reported that they provide some form of on-the-job counselling. The form and amount of counselling varied and was related to the size of the enterprise.

- Policies in government service ensure that all incoming employees receive at least a minimum of induction training on the nature of government service, conditions of employment, and opportunities for advancement, including assistance for further study and in-service training. In the private sector, the larger enterprises such as banks and insurance companies provide comparable career information and planned training schemes.
3. The personal qualities of school leavers were of the greatest overall significance in employer requirements. The most important of these was "a positive, willing attitude".
- Factors considered by employers when interviewing applicants include appearance (dress, cleanliness, neatness) and manner (the general impression created including aspects such as confidence, stability, common sense and maturity).
 - Other personal qualities rated as very important were: a sense of responsibility; respect for authority; loyalty to the employer; punctuality; diligence, the ability to work with and be considerate of others; initiative; and the ability to work without supervision.
4. Employers expect school leavers to have attained a satisfactory level of secondary education. They emphasized a good grounding in the skills of literacy and numeracy.
- With the exception of office skills required for girls, employers did not expect school leavers to have specific pre-vocational training.
 - Employers stressed the need for school leavers to have acquired some understanding of the nature and operation of industry.
 - A small percentage of employers, particularly those in government enterprises, were concerned with such aspects of aptitude and potential in school leaver applicants as the ability to handle responsibility, to pursue higher studies, and to progress to higher levels within the enterprise.
5. The majority of employers surveyed considered that the school leavers they currently employed met their requirements "adequately". However, there were a number of areas in which employers indicated dissatisfaction.
- While a few employers pointed out that young people bring a fresh and enthusiastic approach to the job, the majority, particularly

in the private sector, considered that young people lack qualities of industriousness, application, responsibility, self-discipline, motivation, and respect and courtesy towards others.

- The majority of employers rated the attitude of current school leavers as worse than those of five years ago. They criticised such behaviour characteristics as intolerance and discontent when required to carry out routine tasks, and lack of motivation and ambition.
 - Communication skills, both oral and written, were considered by employers to be unsatisfactory. There was general criticism of standards of literacy, including spelling, handwriting, reading, and following of written instructions.
 - The two areas in which employers perceived least change in school leavers over the previous five years were in standards of numeracy and specific job-related skills.
6. Employers considered that there are three main areas of improvement needed in the pre-vocational preparation of young people:-
- they need to be better informed about their choice of employment, the jobs for which they apply, and how to apply for a position.
 - they lack awareness of the world of work and what is expected of them in employment.
 - there is need for improved vocational guidance. Many young people appeared to have little idea of what they were looking for, or alternatively hold unrealistic aspirations for employment.
7. Employers indicated that they were inadequately informed about what actually goes on in schools today. Nevertheless some of them offered suggestions for change.
- While employers recognized that the home, the community, and the media all influence the formation of attitudes, they attributed a significant importance to the influence of the school and therefore attached some of the 'blame' to the education system for attitude problems encountered in school leavers.
 - The following changes in content or emphasis in teaching in schools were suggested:-
 - more emphasis on the basic skills, particularly verbal skills.

- schools should try to develop in students a more positive attitude towards work, with emphasis upon discipline, responsibility, courtesy and diligence.
 - the need for both students and teachers to be aware of the world of work outside the school.
8. While the majority of employers accepted the current assessment system, a significant minority (28 per cent) indicated need for changes in the systems of assessment and reporting. Some of the recommended changes were:-
- the provision in school reports of more details of personal qualities other than academic performance.
 - standardisation of assessment amongst schools.
 - better explanation of current methods of assessment and reporting.
9. A majority of those surveyed considered that employers should be consulted in educational planning, to a greater extent than is at present the case.
10. Employers suggested two ways in which they could assist schools in preparing students for employment:
- the provision of information on job opportunities and the personal and educational requirements for particular jobs.
 - the direct involvement of students in the work situation through work-experience programmes.

CHAPTER 2: THE SAMPLE

2.1 DATA COLLECTION AND PROCESSING

Information is given below on the collection and processing of data for the survey.

2.11 *Data Collection*

A questionnaire (Appendix 1) was mailed to 384 medium to large enterprises in the Perth metropolitan area. After follow-up, completed questionnaires were returned by 284 of these: a response rate of 74%.

In addition, the opinions of employers in more than 70 small enterprises were obtained by personal interview, using a shortened version of the questionnaire as an interview schedule. (Appendix 2)

Details of the development of the questionnaire, and rationale for the selection of the sample of employers are given in Appendix 3.

2.12 *Data Processing*

Following hand-coding of responses to the "open" questions, the information in the questionnaires was processed by computer. Cross-tabulation of responses to key questions was carried out by type and size of enterprise.

Results are presented in the report as frequencies and percentages only, except where the cross-tabulation revealed significant differences.

2.2 NATURE OF ENTERPRISES SURVEYED BY QUESTIONNAIRE

Details of respondents to the questionnaire are given in Tables 1-5, according to the main purpose, type, location, section, and size of the enterprise.

2.21 Main purpose of the enterprise

TABLE 1

A.S.I.C.* Category	SCHOOL LEAVERS EMPLOYED		SCHOOL LEAVERS NOT EMPLOYED		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	1	.5	-	-	1	.4
2. Mining	1	.5	-	-	1	.4
3. Manufacturing	55	25.1	32	49.2	87	30.6
4. Electricity, Gas and Water	2	.9	-	-	2	.7
5. Construction	21	9.6	2	3.1	23	8.1
6. Wholesale and Retail Trade	52	23.7	12	18.5	64	22.5
7. Transport and Storage	3	1.4	1	1.5	4	1.4
8. Communication	5	2.3	1	1.5	6	2.1
9. Finance, Insurance, Real Estate and Business Services	16	7.3	2	3.1	18	6.3
10. Public Administration and Defence	45	20.5	9	13.8	54	19.0
11. Community Services	9	4.1	4	6.2	13	4.6
12. Entertainment, Recreation Restaurants, Hotels and Personal Services	9	4.1	2	3.1	11	3.9
	219	100	65	100	284	100.0

Most of the local, state and commonwealth government enterprises were classified in category 10 of the A.S.I.C. as "Public Administration and Defence." The defence forces were not included in the survey.

The distribution of enterprises among the categories is similar to that reported in the Australian Bureau of Statistics study "School Leavers 1970 to 1974 : Their Employment Status and Education Experience in May 1975" (16), indicating that the sample is representative of the major areas of the work-force into which school leavers go.

* According to Australian Standard Industrial Classification of The Australian Bureau of Statistics

The major difference in the distribution of enterprises employing or not employing school leavers was in the manufacturing industry, where there was a much higher proportion of enterprises not currently employing school leavers. This could be seen to be in line with a general reduction of employment opportunities in this area.

2.22 Type of enterprise

TABLE 2

Type of enterprise	SCHOOL LEAVERS EMPLOYED		SCHOOL LEAVERS NOT EMPLOYED		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Private employer	150	68.5	53	81.6	203	71.5
Local government	4	1.8	1	1.5	5	1.7
State government	35	16.0	3	4.6	38	13.4
Commonwealth government	18	8.2	7	10.8	25	8.8
Other*	12	5.5	1	1.5	13	4.6
TOTAL	219	100.0	65	100.0	284	100.0

*Government funded, autonomous institutions, e.g. hospitals etc.

The proportion of private to government enterprises is similar to that found in the general workforce. The Australian Bureau of Statistics publication *Employment and Unemployment, August 1977*¹⁷ reports W.A. figures as :

398,100 total workforce

265,100 private employment

133,000 government employment (local, state and commonwealth).

Thus in August 1977, 67% of the workforce in W.A. were in private employment compared with 69% for the total Australian workforce.

Table 2 shows that the majority of enterprises which did not employ school leavers were private employers. Seven out of the twenty five commonwealth government departments surveyed were not currently employing school leavers, reflecting a policy of limited expansion in the public sector.

2.23 Location of enterprise

TABLE 3

Location of enterprise	SCHOOL LEAVERS EMPLOYED		SCHOOL LEAVERS NOT EMPLOYED		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Local	76	34.7	15	23.1	91	32.0
Statewide	61	27.9	16	24.6	77	27.1
National	57	26.0	22	33.8	79	27.8
International	25	11.4	12	18.5	37	13.1
TOTAL	219	100.0	65	100.0	284	100.0

Views of local, statewide, national and international enterprises were covered in the survey. From the distribution of the sample as shown in Table 3, it appears that national and international enterprises may be less likely to employ school leavers.

2.24 Section of enterprise

TABLE 4

Section of enterprise	SCHOOL LEAVERS EMPLOYED		SCHOOL LEAVERS NOT EMPLOYED		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Head Office	113	51.6	29	44.6	142	50.0
Branch	64	29.2	29	44.6	93	32.7
Department	10	4.6	3	4.6	13	4.6
Other*	28	12.8	3	4.6	31	10.9
No Response	4	1.8	1	1.6	5	1.8
TOTAL	219	100.0	65	100.0	284	100.0

*Mostly representing single enterprises.

50% of the employers responding to the questionnaire represented the head office of the enterprise. As noted in Appendix 3, a number of branches of retail stores to which questionnaires were sent indicated that they had been required to pass the survey on to head office for an overall view. This may account for the relatively high proportion of branches not employing school leavers, as the retail industry normally is a major employer of

young people.

2.25 Size of enterprise

Size categories represent the total number of employees in the section of the enterprise completing the questionnaire.

TABLE 5

Number of staff	SCHOOL LEAVERS EMPLOYED		SCHOOL LEAVERS NOT EMPLOYED		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
10	7	3.2	1	1.5	8	2.8
11 - 20	19	8.7	6	9.2	25	8.8
21 - 50	36	16.4	22	33.8	58	20.4
51 - 100	22	10.0	13	20.0	35	12.3
101 - 200	41	18.7	15	23.2	56	19.7
201 +	92	42.0	8	12.3	100	35.2
No response	2	1.0	-	-	2	0.8
TOTAL	219	100.0	65	100.0	284	100.0

The distribution of the sample reflects the fact that the survey focussed on medium to large enterprises. It appears that 'medium' size enterprises, particularly those with between 21 and 100 employees, were less likely to employ school leavers.

2.3 NATURE OF ENTERPRISES SURVEYED BY INTERVIEW

Interviews with employers in small businesses were conducted in two suburban shopping centres; one serving an average income area and the other serving a well-established generally above-average socio-economic area. Because of the small numbers involved in different categories, most of the results will be presented and discussed in a general way.

2.31 *Small business respondents*

TABLE 6

Business category	N	%
Clothing (Fabric, Men's and Ladies' Fashion, Sportswear)	14	20.0
Footwear	4	5.7
Hardware	4	5.7
Furniture	3	4.3
Pharmacy	3	4.3
Hairdresser (Ladies and Men's)	4	5.7
Drycleaner	2	2.9
Newsagent	4	5.7
Gifts	3	4.3
Florist	2	2.9
Art, Cameras, Music	4	5.7
Petrol station, Motor accessories	4	5.7
Cycles, Surfboards		
Food (Cafe, Greengrocer, Liquor, Butcher, Baker)	12	16.9
Post Office, Bank, Building Society	3	4.3
Travel Agent	1	1.5
Optical Dispenser and Manufacturer	1	1.5
General Store	2	2.9
TOTAL	70	100.0

A variety of small retail shops was covered by the interviews. The sample also included the views of branch managers of a bank, post office, building society and retail chain store.

Type of enterprise - Apart from the post office, the sample consisted entirely of private employers.

Size of enterprise - The majority of the small businesses in the survey employed less than 6 people, with the exception of the retail chain store which had a staff of approximately 100. Some employed casual or part-time workers on Saturday mornings or other busy periods.

2.4 SCHOOL LEAVERS IN THE WORKFORCE

2.41 Larger enterprises

Employers were asked to list the positions currently filled by school leavers in the particular section of the enterprise. Not all employers were able to give the actual numbers of school leavers employed. For those who provided this information, details are given in Table 7.

TABLE 7
Positions filled by school leavers

School leaver position	Males	Number of Employers	Females	Number of Employers	Total (M+F)	Total number of employers
1. Clerk	1523	64	1186	74	2709	138
2. Clerical assistant	325	21	573	43	898	64
3. Typist/Stenographer Receptionist/Telephonist	4	2	374	46	378	48
4. Accounting Machinist/ Data Processing Operator	1	1	87	8	88	9
5. Shop Assistant	194	14	997	16	1191	30
6. Apprentice	2194	96	95	11	2289	107
7. Trainee (Cadet)	584	28	392	11	976	39
8. Stores/ Warehouse Assistant	140	13	38	3	178	16
9. **Semi-skilled and other n.e.c.	356	34	274	19	630	53
TOTAL	5321	273	4016	231	9337	504*

*This figure exceeds the total sample size (284) because a number of enterprises employ school leavers in more than one type of position.

**The 'semi-skilled' category included positions such as factory hand, labourer, tray girl etc.

It might be noted that there is evidence of sex-role stereotyping of occupations, in that females predominated the clerical assistant, typist/stenographer, receptionist/telephonist, accounting machinist/data processing operator and shop assistant categories, while males predominated the clerk, apprentice, trainee/cadet and stores/warehouse assistant categories.

From Table 7 it will be seen that the survey is based on employers' views of more than 9,000 school leavers in employment, even though several employers did not indicate the numbers of school leavers employed.

2.42 *Smaller enterprises*

39 of the 70 small businesses in the sample (56%) employed school leavers, in most cases only one or two.

The majority employed school leavers as :-

1. Shop assistants
2. Checkout operators
3. Apprentices (mainly hairdressing)
4. Trainees (e.g. a management trainee in the retail store, trainee travel consultant; trainee piano tuner)

2.43 *Positions for school leavers which were difficult to fill*

29 employers of whom the majority were private employers, indicated that there were positions in the enterprise suitable for school leavers which were difficult to fill. A variety of positions was mentioned, including apprenticeships such as moulding, blacksmithing; clerical workers, typists, shop assistants, parts assistants, factory staff, drafting assistants, cadets, trainee managers, computer workers.

The main reasons given for difficulty in filling these positions were :-

lack of skills : basic (literacy, numeracy) and specific to the job,
e.g. typing, shorthand;

the nature of the job : complexity (some clerical tasks, computer work);
the repetitive nature of the job (e.g. parts assistant);
"image" of the job (e.g. trainee manager in the retail area).

personal qualities of the applicants : attitude, lack of interest, enthusiasm
(e.g. clerical work, factory work, apprentices, sales cadets).

need for country location/travelling as part of the job : e.g. trainee managers, some clerical positions.

lack of experience : e.g. shop assistants.

lack of applicants : e.g. clerical work, male hairdressing apprentices.

However, as one employer summed up the situation: "it is not so much a matter of having positions which are difficult to fill, but the difficulty in obtaining worthwhile staff."

2.5 REASONS FOR NOT EMPLOYING SCHOOL LEAVERS

65 'larger' enterprises in the survey did not employ school leavers. Stated reasons for not doing so are given in Table 8.

TABLE 8

Reason for not employing school leavers	Respondents - school leavers not employed	
	N	%
No suitable jobs	39	60.0
Prefer employees with some experience	23	35.4
No suitable applicants	8	12.3
Too immature	7	10.8
School leavers unsuitable in the past	6	9.2
Unstable (change jobs frequently)	6	9.2
Too expensive	5	7.7
Unrealistic job expectations	3	4.6
Policy matter	2	3.1
Other	12	18.5
POSSIBLE TOTAL	65	*

*Note: Percentages do not total 100 as some employers stated more than one reason.

The most frequently mentioned and obvious reason why school leavers were not employed was that there were no suitable jobs (60% of enterprises). This was attributed partly to the general downturn in the economy and to the nature of particular industries. Several comments related to computerization. For example :

"We no longer employ school leavers, partly due to reduced company activity in this state, and partly due to the advent of computerization, for which today's school leavers have neither the inclination nor the endurance required for the satisfactory execution of such jobs."

The next most frequently mentioned reason was a preference for employees with some experience (35%). Allied to this was the immaturity of school leavers (11%). Several employers pointed out that their type of enterprise called for more mature, experienced people, particularly in community welfare fields, in businesses where prominence was placed on customer relations or

in a few cases because of the dangerous nature of company products.

Eight enterprises (12%) indicated 'no suitable applicants' as the main reason for not employing school leavers. A variety of positions for which there were no suitable applicants was mentioned, including unskilled and semi-skilled positions, clerical, factory, stores, shop assistant, computing assistant and checkout operators. Most of the reasons given for difficulty in recruiting to these positions were specific to the enterprise concerned. These included the opinion that young people applying for jobs did not seem eager to work; that it was easier to seek unemployment relief than to learn new skills; lack of suitable training available once employment commenced, and lack of experience, particularly for clerical positions.

As one employer commented: "The age 30 group of employees, while costing more initially, save dollars firstly in usually remaining in their jobs, and secondly in bringing to their jobs relevant training or special skills obtained in allied industries".

Included in other listed reasons for not employing school leavers was a small percentage of employers who had found school leavers to be: unsuitable in the past, too expensive relative to their work output, unstable, unreliable, or as having unrealistic job expectations.

Most of the comments relating to the category of "other" reasons why school leavers were not employed were single comments specific to the particular enterprise. Absenteeism, regulations in some union awards, and the fact that young people may not be physically strong enough for heavy labouring work, were some of the reasons given. Others noted that with a stable labour force, there was no need to increase staff and consequently vacancies were rare.

Overall, the two major reasons for not employing school leavers were lack of suitable jobs and preference for more experienced people. Less than 10% of the enterprises stated unsatisfactory performance in the past as the reason for not employing school leavers. No employers mentioned low standards of literacy as a reason for not employing school leavers.

In the small businesses, 31 of the 70 employers interviewed (44%) did not employ school leavers. The major reasons given were similar to those given above, although more of these employers had found school leavers to be

unsuitable in the past, particularly for reasons such as attitude, punctuality and responsibility. Several indicated that they could be prepared to employ a junior if they could find one who was prepared to work hard. As many of these small businesses were run as family concerns, however, vacancies did not often arise.

2.6 THE CURRENT EMPLOYMENT SITUATION FOR SCHOOL LEAVERS

Employers were asked to indicate how the number of school leavers currently employed compared with numbers over the preceding two years.

TABLE 9

Number of school leavers currently employed compared with the preceding two years.

Proportion of school leavers employed	Enterprises employing school leavers	
	N	%
More currently employed	44	20.1
No change	140	63.9
Fewer currently employed	28	12.8
No response	7	3.2
TOTAL	219	100

64% of these employers reported no significant change in the number of school leavers currently employed compared with the preceding two years.

Of the 13% who reported fewer school leavers currently employed, the majority attributed this to the downturn in the economic situation, while several mentioned the need for skilled staff to cope with increased mechanization, particularly in computer work. When these figures were analysed further by type of employer, the greatest cut-back in employment of school leavers appeared to be in commonwealth government departments. This is not unexpected in view of a policy of consolidation and limited growth in the public sector.

Despite the gloomy forecasts by the media of employment prospects for school leavers, 20% of the enterprises surveyed reported that more school leavers were currently employed than had been two years earlier.

The majority in this category were private employers. Some of the reasons given for increased school leaver intake included : company expansion, demand for apprentices, and a desire to assist the unemployment situation through schemes such as S.Y.E.T.P. (Special Youth Employment Training Programme).

2.61 *Enterprises not employing school leavers - future prospects*

11 employers (48% of those not currently employing school leavers) indicated that school leavers were likely to be employed in the next two or three years.

The most likely avenue of future employment was in general office duties, including clerical and typing positions. Other possible areas listed were :- apprenticeships, particularly in the sheetmetal, plumbing, refrigeration and woodwork trades; semi-skilled and unskilled positions, such as work on construction sites, processing in factories, hospital work; and the general retail field, including positions as shop assistants, cashiers and check-out operators.

These figures offer some hope for additional opportunities for school leavers in the workforce in the next two or three years. However, in the smaller businesses, most of those not currently employing school leavers indicated that they were unlikely to do so in the future.

CHAPTER 3: RECRUITMENT AND INDUCTION

3.1 RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION

Information was obtained from the employers on responsibility for recruitment of staff, preference for school leavers from particular school backgrounds, provision of career information to schools, participation in work-experience programmes, and methods of selection used.

3.11 *Larger enterprises: responsibility for recruitment*

The majority of the employers surveyed (84%) carried out their own recruitment of staff. Private employers were more likely to be responsible for their own recruitment than those in state or commonwealth government departments as selection and appointment for the latter usually takes place through the respective Public Service Boards.

3.12 *Larger enterprises: preference for school leavers from particular school backgrounds*

Employers were asked whether they preferred school leavers from government, Catholic, other Independent schools, or no preference. Responses indicated that they were almost unanimous in stating that they had no preference for young people from a particular type of school background. Most of the comments emphasized the importance of individual qualities rather than 'the old school tie'. However, it is also possible that some employers would be reluctant to state a preference even if they privately held one because of social pressures against discrimination.

3.13 *Larger enterprises: provision of career information*

More than half of the enterprises in which school leavers were currently employed stated that they provided schools with career information, compared with only 28% of the enterprises in which school leavers were not currently employed. The private employers were less likely to provide such information than state or commonwealth government enterprises where once again the respective Public Service Boards would routinely prepare and distribute such information..

The most popular way of familiarizing schools with careers was by arranging visits by students to the workplace. Other methods used included the provision of written publicity material, visiting speakers, and the use of

films or tapes. Responses indicated a desire by employers to give students first-hand knowledge of actual working conditions.

3.14 *Larger enterprises: participation in work-experience programmes*

Almost half of the enterprises surveyed were taking part in work-experience programmes, and a further 30% of the remainder indicated that they would be willing to take part. The arrangements for these programmes vary, but usually a student works for one or two weeks while still at school in order to 'experience' a work situation. The Youth Education Branch of the State Education Department is largely responsible for organizing and conducting these programmes and the number of students participating has increased each year.

Enterprises in which school leavers were currently employed were more likely to be taking part in work experience programmes than those in which school leavers were not currently employed.

While work-experience programmes have operated for several years on an informal, ad-hoc basis, the more formalised, planned programmes have only been established since the early 1970's. Their value appears to be well recognised by employers and students alike.

3.15 *Larger enterprises: methods of selection*

Employers were asked to indicate how school leavers are selected for employment. The major methods of selection used are given in Table 10.

TABLE 10

How school leavers are selected for employment.

Methods of selection (derived from responses)	Enterprises employing school leavers	
	N	%
Interview only	93	42.5
General aptitude tests	52	23.7
Specific entry tests	48	21.9
School examination results	48	21.9
School references	24	11.0
No response	15	6.8
POSSIBLE TOTAL	219	*

*Percentages do not total 100 as several employers used more than one method.

It could be assumed that in most cases, school leavers would be interviewed before being selected for employment. In fact, almost half of the employers (42.5%) stated that the interview was the only method of selection used, with private employers being significantly more likely to rely on interview only than government employers.

General aptitude tests were used by 24% of employers. These would usually be administered by an outside body such as the Counselling Service of the Technical Education Division of the W.A. Education Department. A few employers considered that such tests were an unrealistic way in which to gauge leavers' potential.

22% of employers used entry tests specific to the enterprise. State and commonwealth government enterprises were the major users of specific entry tests with only 10% of private employers using this method.

School examination results were mentioned by 22% of employers as part of their selection procedures. This included the *Achievement Certificate*, examination results at the end of the Year 11, the *Certificate of Secondary Education* and results in the *Tertiary Admissions Examination*. Several employers mentioned that providing an applicant met the minimum educational requirements, personal factors were considered to be more important.

Only 11% of employers mentioned school references as being considered in the selection of school leavers. As employers were not specifically asked how much attention they gave to examination results and school references, it is difficult to say how representative these figures are of employers in general. However, from some of the comments made several employers appeared to lack confidence in school references and reports.

There were major differences in the method of selection used by private employers when compared with employers in state and commonwealth government enterprises. The dependence of private employers on the interview only, and the greater use of specific entry tests by state and commonwealth government employers, is shown clearly in Figure 1.

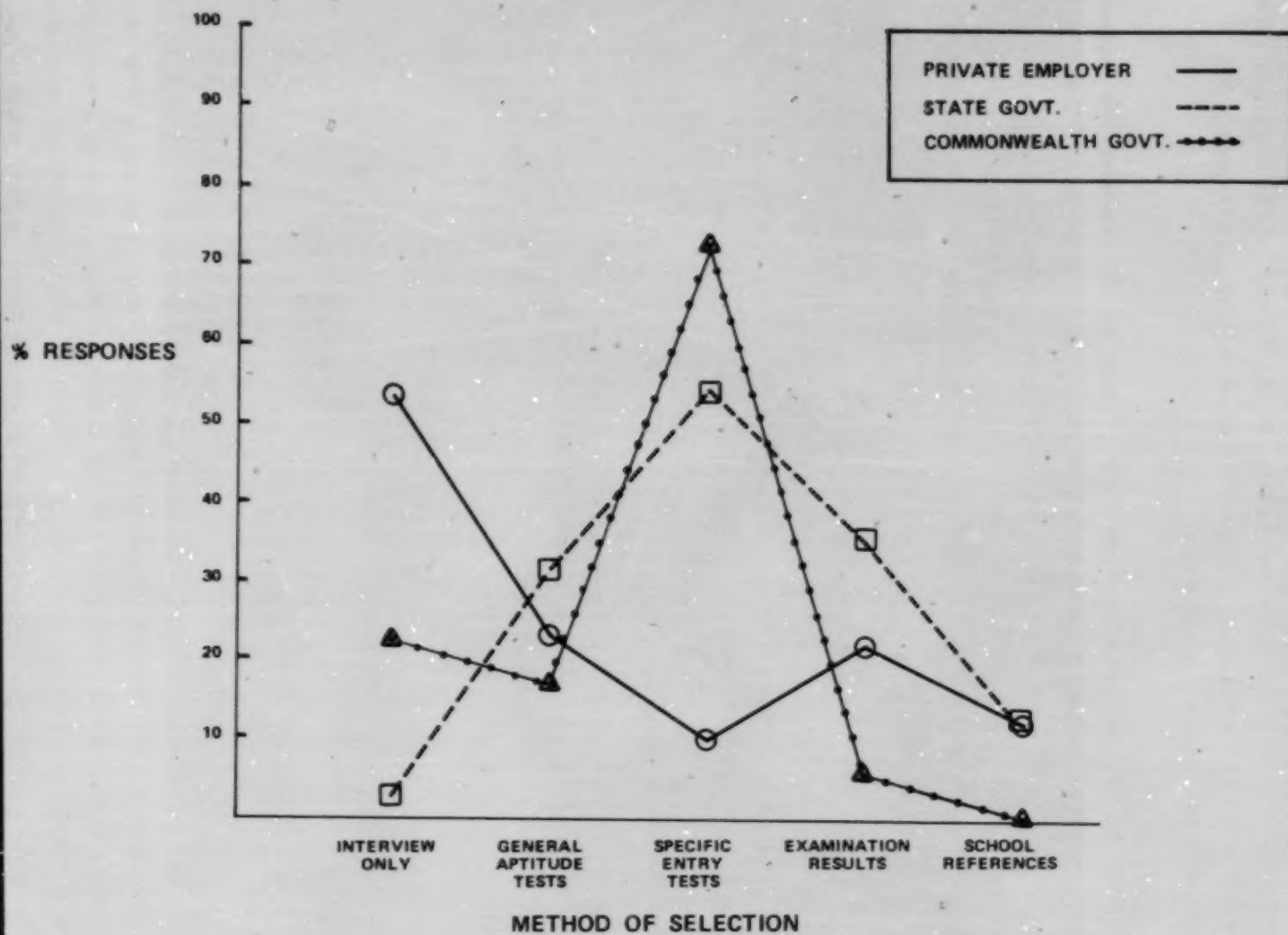


FIGURE 1. METHOD OF SELECTION FOR EMPLOYMENT, BY TYPE OF EMPLOYER

3.16 *Smaller enterprises*

Most of the employers interviewed carried out their own recruitment and relied on a personal interview as the main basis for selection of school leaver applicants. Only the larger retail store used a specific entry test and none of the employers used information from aptitude tests. The overall impression created by the young person at the interview was regarded as more important than educational attainment, school reports, references etc. although these were considered.

Several of the employers used the local branch of the Commonwealth Employment Service as their major source of school leaver employees. Others noted that there was seldom any need to advertise positions for young people: positions were easily filled as they became available either as a result of previous personal enquiries or through contact with friends or relatives.

None of the employers interviewed were participating in a work-experience programme, nor were they involved in the provision of career information for schools. The small number of employees would in most cases preclude the possibility and/or the necessity for this.

3.2 TRAINING AND COUNSELLING

Employers were asked to indicate whether personnel officer(s) and training officer(s) were employed in their section of the enterprise and whether on-the-job counselling was provided for school leaver employees.

103 enterprises (47% of those currently employing school leavers) employed a designated personnel officer and 74 (34%) employed a training officer. Size and type of enterprise were important factors with personnel and training staff more likely to be employed in larger enterprises and in government enterprises.

3.21 *Larger enterprises: provision of on-the-job counselling for school leaver employees*

162 employers (74% of those currently employing school leavers) stated that on-the-job counselling was provided for school leavers. Size of enterprise was an important factor, with 86% of enterprises employing 200 or more staff providing counselling, compared with only 56% of those in the category of 21 - 50 employees.

29.
There was a variety of responses to the question of who carried out counselling and the form this took. Most personal or work-related counselling was provided by senior staff members including personnel and training officers, and also section managers, foremen, apprentice masters, or other supervisory staff.

The form of counselling varied. Larger enterprises were more likely to incorporate regular reviews of employee progress, group discussions and personal interviews, while smaller enterprises relied more on informal, spontaneous discussion which could be initiated by the employer or the employee.

3.22 *Larger enterprises: training provided for school leaver employees*

Government (local, state and commonwealth) enterprises were more likely than private employers to provide on-the-job training and offer incentives for further study such as time off with pay, payment of fees and pay loading for higher qualifications.

The form and amount of training provided was also related to the type and level of position. Generally young people in positions for which minimal educational standards were required (e.g. stores/warehouse assistant, semi-skilled and some shop assistant positions) were offered little in the way of training. What was available was usually un-planned, on-the-job.

Applicants for positions such as receptionist/telephonist, typist/stenographer, accounting machinist, and data processing operator were expected to have already been trained in the basic skills required for the job. Unless progress beyond the particular level of the position was desired training was mostly geared to familiarization with the specific job.

The various government departments were the major employers of young people in the positions classified as 'clerk' or 'clerical assistant', and as noted before, planned training programs were offered, particularly at the level which required satisfactory completion of Year 12 for entry.

The area of apprenticeship training is well-defined and apprentices are released to attend the relevant instruction provided by the Technical Education Division. Similarly, positions designated as trainee/cadet had planned on-the-job training provided as well as the usual incentives and assistance for further study.

The picture that emerged on the type and amount of training available to young people was that it was very much related to the type of employer and level of position. There would appear to be a need to examine the training requirements of positions at the lower end of the scale to see if more formalised and planned guidance could improve employee efficiency and satisfaction.

3.23 *Smaller enterprises*

Apart from the larger retail store which offered a well-organized induction and training program for new recruits, training provided for young people would be on-the-job and usually without specific planning; that is, the job is learned by working with a more experienced person. Where the small business was a branch of a group of stores, there was more likely to be a planned training program. For example, the ladies' sportswear store (one of a number in various suburbs) trained the new employee in the basis of knowledge of stock, pricing, handling of money, ordering, purchasing and display so that after two years the employee would be eligible to become a store supervisor and possibly progress or move to another branch.

Training for apprentice positions was similar to that in the larger enterprises with compulsory attendance at the relevant Technical Education course and experience gained on-the-job.

The employers offering 'trainee' positions provided planned training, mostly on-the-job. In the case of the trainee travel consultant, airline ticketing courses were available, while management trainees in the larger retail store were covered by courses offered by the head office of the store.

There was little in the way of formal counselling available to young people working in small businesses. They would need to establish a good relationship with the proprietor and any counselling as such would be on an informal, ad-hoc basis.

The value of formal and informal counselling has not been assessed and the fact that formal counselling is not available need not necessarily be a disadvantage to the young person.

3.3 ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES IN EMPLOYING SCHOOL LEAVERS

3.31 *Larger enterprises*

All employers were asked to indicate what they considered to be the major

advantages (if any) and the major disadvantages (if any) in employing school leavers. Results for all respondents are given in Table 11. The categories were derived from the responses.

TABLE 11
ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES IN EMPLOYING SCHOOL LEAVERS

ADVANTAGES			DISADVANTAGES		
	ALL ENTERPRISES			ALL ENTERPRISES	
	N	%		N	%
Easier to train	129	45.4	Lack of experience	67	23.6
Cost	31	10.9	Cost and time required to train	44	15.5
Enthusiastic approach	14	4.9	Attitude	59	20.8
None	21	7.4	None	32	11.3
No response	105	37.0	No response	105	37.0
POSSIBLE TOTAL	284	*	POSSIBLE TOTAL	284	*

*Percentages do not total 100 as some employers gave more than one response

The response rate to this question was low. Many employers appeared to consider that their responses to other questions and general comments had indicated their views.

For those who did respond, the following categories of advantages and disadvantages were derived.

3.32 *Advantages in employing school leavers*

The major advantage noted related to a number of comments categorized as "easier to train". By this employers meant that young people were more "malleable" and easier to "train to the company mould" than older workers. In other words, young people enter the workforce with few preconceived ideas about how a job should be performed and thus were more ready to accept guidelines and follow established procedures. Included in this category were some comments on the need to ensure continuity in staffing and to maintain a balanced ratio of old and young employees. 45% of the employers mentioned the training factor as a major advantage in employing school leavers.

The second major advantage noted, particularly by private employers, was that of 'cost' - i.e. the lower wages paid to young people. However,

overall only 11% of employers considered the cost factor an advantage.

A few employers (5%) considered that the positive and enthusiastic approach of some young people was an advantage.

Several employers (7%) specifically stated that there were no advantages in employing school leavers.

3.33. *Disadvantages in employing school leavers*

The most frequently mentioned disadvantage in employing school leavers was lack of experience, noted by 24% of employers. This is a 'Catch 22' situation in which employers are reluctant to take on people without experience, while without experience young people have difficulty in being accepted for employment. Perhaps current and planned subsidy schemes for employers taking on young workers will help to overcome this problem.

Private employers were more likely to mention lack of work experience as a major disadvantage. This is not surprising as the Public Service (State and commonwealth government) has provision for an annual intake of school leavers and expects to train these people.

The second most frequently mentioned disadvantage in employing school leavers has been termed "attitude". This was mentioned by 21% of all employers, who felt that school leavers were often reluctant to apply themselves, were unreliable, unpredictable, immature, unable to make minor decisions, were often absent without good cause and were more interested in social activities than in working. The easy availability of "the dole" was frequently given as a reason for young people's lack of incentive to work hard.

Another disadvantage in employing school leavers was the cost and time required to train them. This was mentioned by 15.5% of all employers and by 20% of private employers. Several stated that any advantage in low wages was negated by the low productivity and high wastage rates among new recruits. Some also pointed out that in certain positions the wage differential between a young inexperienced person and a mature experienced person was insufficient to make the former an attractive proposition. As one employer commented: "Under our Federal award, an 18 year old is entitled to full adult pay. We are unlikely to be convinced that their contribution is similar to adult workers."

11% of employers specifically stated that there were no disadvantages in employing school leavers. This view was held by a higher proportion of those who did currently employ young people. Perhaps the views of employers not currently employing school leavers would change if their contact with young people were extended.

From the responses to this question it can be seen that there was some inconsistency in employers perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages in employing school leavers. While some considered the enthusiastic approach of young people to be advantage, many more considered that the general attitude of young people was a disadvantage. Similarly, while some employers noted the lower cost of employing school leavers as an advantage, many more considered the cost and time required to train young people as a major disadvantage.

These apparent inconsistencies are further evidence of the variety of views held by employers in their attitudes to school leavers.

3.34 *Smaller enterprises*

Views expressed here were similar to those indicated above. The major difference was that the employers in the small businesses emphasized the 'attitude' factor as the major disadvantage in employing school leavers. Several commented that they preferred to employ married women, in particular because of their conscientiousness and reliability.

As one stated: "School leavers tend to lack 'stickability'. They will leave a job if they don't like it even if they don't have another job to go to - they know they can get the dole."

CHAPTER 4

EMPLOYER EXPECTATIONS OF SCHOOL LEAVERS

The survey obtained information on employer expectations of school leavers.

Figure 2 presents the major categories derived from responses for the overall qualities sought in school leaver applicants.

4.1 PERSONAL QUALITIES

In responding to the question: "On the whole, what are the overall qualities you look for in school leaver applicants?", considerable importance was attached to the personal qualities of school leavers by all employers.

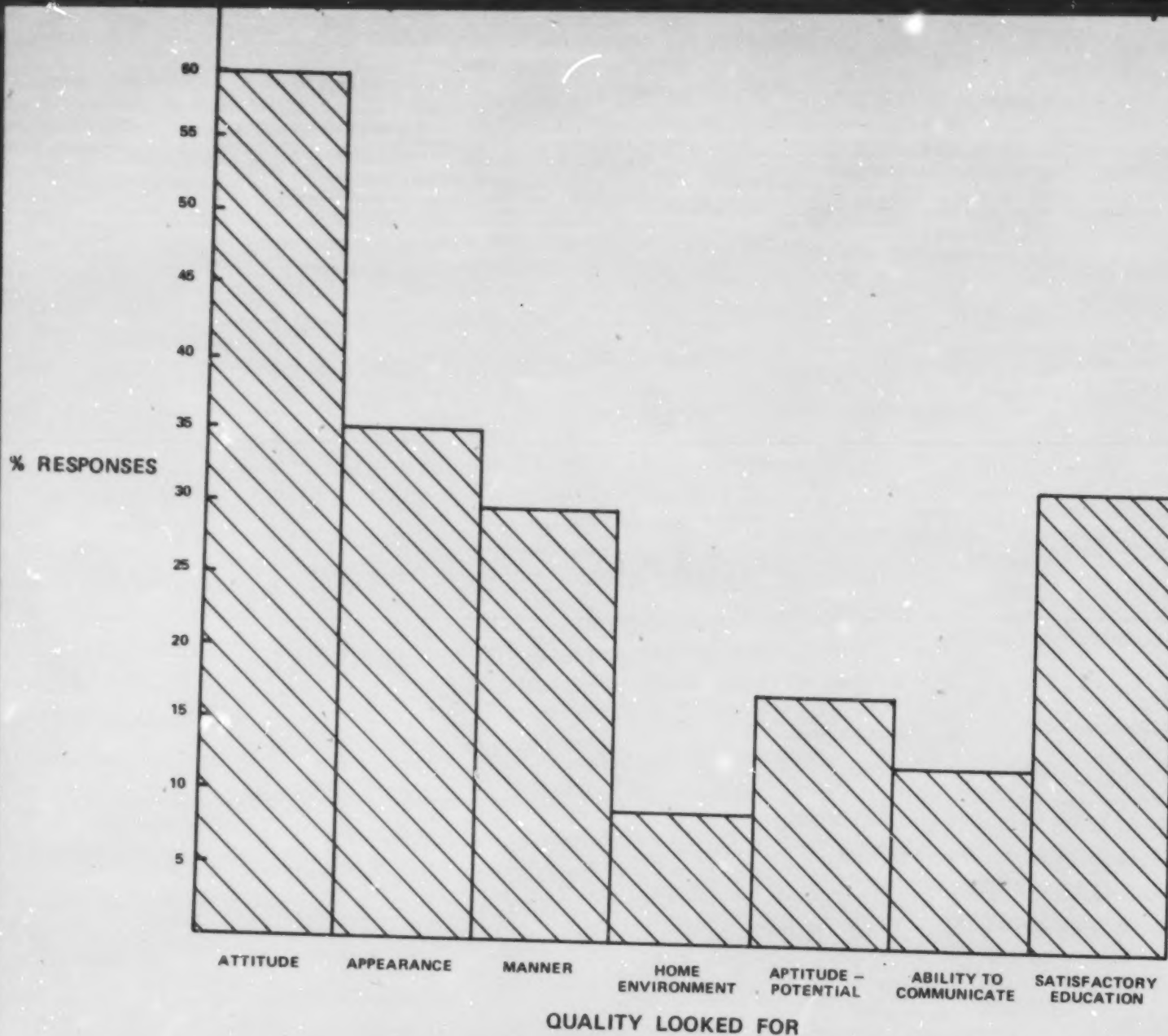
The overriding personal quality sought has been termed "a positive willing attitude" and was mentioned by 60% of all employers. The emphasis was on a positive and enthusiastic approach to work with respect for seniors as one aspect. Private employers in particular stressed the importance of 'attitude'.

The next most frequently mentioned personal qualities have been designated "personal presentation - appearance" (35% of employers) and "personal presentation - manner" (30% of employers).

'Appearance' related to standards of dress, cleanliness, neatness and the overall impression created by the young person. Private and state government employers in particular attached importance to the appearance of applicants.

'Manner' related more to the personal impression created by the young person and included factors such as confidence, stability, commonsense and maturity. Again, private and state government employers stressed the importance of "manner".

Differences in expectations between private, state and commonwealth government employers are shown in Figure 3.



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FIGURE 2. QUALITIES SOUGHT IN SCHOOL LEAVER APPLICANTS

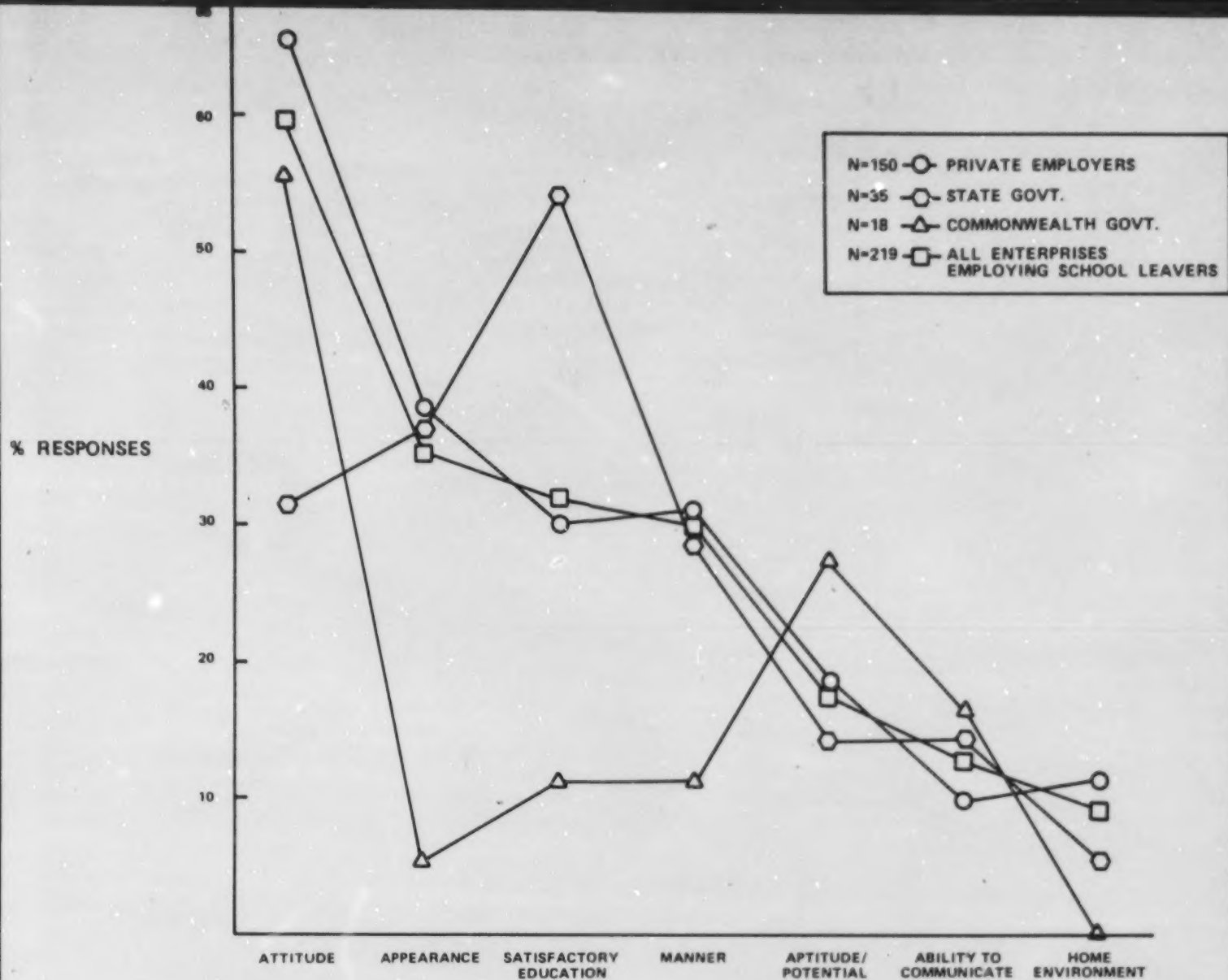


FIGURE 3. QUALITIES SOUGHT IN SCHOOL LEAVER APPLICANTS BY TYPE OF EMPLOYER

"Aptitude/potential" was mentioned as an important quality sought in school leaver applicants by 17% of the employers. This incorporated not only ability for a particular job, but also ability to handle responsibility, to undertake higher studies and/or to progress to higher levels within the enterprise. Commonwealth government employers showed particular interest in the 'aptitude/potential' dimension.

Another quality with both personal and educational dimensions has been termed "the ability to communicate." This related to oral expression generally, including comprehensions of instructions, ability to speak clearly, and use of the telephone, and was mentioned by 13% of employers.

The 'home environment' of young people was mentioned by a small number of employers (9%) - mostly private employers. This included aspects such as "stable family life", "clean living" and was often inferred from the school leaver's appearance, courtesy and general manner. As one employer commented: "we can teach young people their occupation; their home has to teach the personal qualities."

Information on employer expectations was also obtained from a section of the questionnaire which presented employers with a list of skills and personal attributes and asked them to rate the importance of each and how often each appeared to be a problem with school leavers currently or recently employed. Detailed analysis of responses was carried out by type of employer and category of school leaver position, but no significant differences emerged. Therefore, responses will be discussed in general terms only.

The personal qualities most often rated as very important for the job were:-

- (i) sense of responsibility, respect for authority, loyalty to the employer;
- (ii) punctuality and diligence; ability to work with and be considerate of others;
- (iii) initiative, self-confidence and the ability to work without supervision;
- (iv) "oral communication" - clear speech, use of the telephone, message-taking etc.

These ratings confirm the importance attached to personal qualities by employers in their expectations of school leavers.

The employers in the small businesses also stressed the importance of the personal qualities of school leaver applicants, particularly their appearance, with emphasis on neatness and conformity.

4.2 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Of the employers surveyed, 32% indicated that they were looking for young people with a "satisfactory education". The emphasis was on sound, all-round, basic education, and no great stress was laid on "the three R's" as such. If applicants met the minimum educational standards required for particular positions, personal qualities were usually considered to be more important. Thus while employers preferred students with good academic results, several commented that they did not necessarily choose those with outstanding results. As one employer stated : "I would rather employ a steady, well-balanced individual with average ability than a brilliant student who has a chip on his shoulder or a very unbalanced background."

When the figures were broken down by type of employer, (see Figure 3) the state government employers in particular emphasized the importance of the educational standards of applicants. Because of the strict minimum educational requirements laid down for all government positions, it is possible that commonwealth government respondents assumed that applicants had met these requirements, and therefore nominated other qualities.

Employers were also asked to rate the importance of a number of skills and attributes for particular school leaver positions. Detailed analysis of responses revealed no significant differences between types of employer.

The educational skills rated most frequently as important or very important were:-

- (i) Oral communication;
- (ii) General number skills - including simple arithmetic calculations;
- (iii) Written communication - handwriting, simple letter or report-writing, spelling, grammar etc.;
- (iv) Reading.

4.21 *Specific educational requirements*

Specific educational requirements varied according to the type of school leaver position. A summary of responses is given below. (see Table 7).

Clerk (138 employers)

More than 50% of the enterprises required completion of Year 10 (*Achievement Certificate*) while a further 30% required completion of Year 12 (*Certificate of Secondary Education*). The state and commonwealth government were the major employers of clerks and the respective Public Service Boards set strict minimum educational requirements which must be met.

Clerical Assistant (65 employers)

This was another position in which the state and commonwealth government were the major employers, although "general office duties" was included in this category.

More than 50% of the employers required completion of Year 10, but a further 25% stated that there was no specified minimum educational standard.

Typist/Stenographer (38 employers) and Receptionist/Telephonist (10 employers)

Completion of Year 10 was required by the majority of employers in these categories.

Accounting Machinist (4 employers) and Data Processing Operator (5 employers)

The state government was the main employer for these positions with completion of Year 10 required.

Shop Assistant (30 employers)

50% of the employers required completion of Year 10, while the remaining 50% stated that there was no specified minimum educational standard.

Apprentice (107 employers)

A variety of apprenticeships was covered including the metal, electrical, building, printing, vehicle, food and other trades. More than 70% of employers preferred completion of Year 10 while about 20% stated there was no specified minimum educational standard. 8% of employers nominated completion of Year 11 as a prerequisite, presumably with the intention of

improving the educational levels of apprentice intake.

Trainee/Cadet (39 employers)

More than 50% of the employers required completion of Year 12 while most of the remainder specified completion of Year 10 or Year 11. As these were training positions, it was expected that educational requirements for entry would be specified.

Stores/Warehouse Assistant (16 employers) and Semi-skilled, Other (53 employers).

This group covered a variety of positions, and the majority of employers stated that there was no specified minimum educational standard, apart from a few positions such as drafting assistant which required completion of Year 10.

These comments indicated considerable variation in the minimum educational requirements for positions of similar title and specification. In the smaller enterprises, the level of education required was related to the type of position occupied by the school leaver. Again, the emphasis was on a sound basic education and most employers did not specify minimum educational standards required. Personal qualities were usually considered to be more important.

4.22 *Vocational Preparation*

In responding to the question of the overall qualities sought in school leaver applicants, employers did not appear to expect specific vocational preparation except for certain positions such as typist/stenographer, accounting machinist/data processing operator, and a few apprentice areas.

A number of employers considered that specific job skills could only be learned on-the-job. However, they stressed the need for young people to have acquired some understanding of the nature and operation of industry, commerce and/or government and to have an appreciation of what would be required of them on taking up employment.

Very few 'special skills' were mentioned by employers as prerequisites for specific jobs. Shorthand, typing and book-keeping, were regularly noted for positions in the clerical, receptionist areas, and practical skills were important for apprentices. The employers in small businesses

also expected little in the way of specific vocational preparation. However, they expected young people to be prepared for the realities of the world of work - to be aware of the need to be punctual, reliable, neatly dressed and "to do a full day's work for a full day's pay".

In general, it appeared that employers expected school leavers to have a sound basic education and an awareness of the realities of the world of work, but overall personal qualities appeared to be of prime importance.

CHAPTER 5 : EMPLOYER PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL LEAVERS

Employers' perceptions of school leavers currently employed will be presented in terms of their general views, perceptions of the personal qualities, educational attainments and vocational preparation of school leavers, and their assessment of school leavers of today compared with those of about five years ago.

5.1 GENERAL VIEWS

There was no notable difference between the views of the employers in the larger enterprises and the smaller businesses, although the latter tended to be more satisfied with the school leavers they currently employed. The 'small business' employers would have more opportunity to supervise the work of the young employee and would have no reason to continue the services of an unsatisfactory person. In fact several mentioned that they had found it necessary to terminate the employment of young people because of poor work attitude, laziness and absenteeism.

Employers in the larger enterprises were asked: "How well do the school leavers you employ meet your requirements?"

Responses are given in Table 12.

TABLE 12
HOW WELL SCHOOL LEAVERS EMPLOYED MEET EMPLOYERS' REQUIREMENTS

RESPONSE CATEGORY	ENTERPRISES EMPLOYING SCHOOL LEAVERS	
	N	%
Very well	35	16.0
Adequately	155	70.8
Not very well	22	10.0
Poorly	4	1.8
No response	3	1.4
TOTAL	219	100.0

In view of the generally derogatory comments about school leavers publicised in the media, the figures above are perhaps more favourable than would have been anticipated.

However, there are some possible explanations. Even though the majority of employers indicated adequate satisfaction with the school leavers they employed, it could be considered that a more desirable situation would be for the majority of employers to endorse school leavers as meeting their requirements "very well".

As many employers pointed out, the current economic situation of a large labour force and a limited supply of jobs provided a wider choice of applicants and therefore the chances of finding suitable school leavers were increased. Equally if not more important was the fact that only school leavers who did meet employers requirements were kept on; hence it was more likely that their performance would be considered satisfactory. In fact, termination of school leavers' employment in the preceding twelve months had taken place in 41% of the enterprises surveyed.

Only private employers considered that school leavers did not meet their requirements satisfactorily. Whether the government employers were reluctant to indicate dissatisfaction, or whether the selection process for government employees acted as a more successful screening device was not possible to determine from this survey.

Enterprises not currently employing school leavers but which had done so in the preceding 5 years were asked how satisfactory they had been. As will be seen from Table 13 these indicate a less favourable view of school leaver employees than that shown by employers currently employing school leavers.

TABLE 13
HOW SATISFACTORY WERE SCHOOL LEAVERS EMPLOYED
DURING THE LAST 5 YEARS?

RESPONSE CATEGORY	ENTERPRISES NOT EMPLOYING SCHOOL LEAVERS	
	N	%
Very satisfactory	9	18.4
Satisfactory	24	49.0
Not very satisfactory	15	30.6
No response	1	2.0
TOTAL	49	100.0

Employers were asked to indicate three major areas of improvement needed by school leavers applying for positions with the enterprise. (Figure 4)

The response rate to this question was relatively low, with almost one in five employers having omitted it. The question was answered somewhat inconsistently, some employers approaching it from the point of view of the school leaver's actual interview performance and the areas of improvement needed in that situation, and others approaching it from a more general viewpoint, considering school leavers currently or recently employed.

Seven major areas of improvement needed were derived from the responses: attitude, verbal skills, appearance, general vocational preparation, number skills, communication and manner. These will be discussed below in terms of personal qualities, educational attainment and general vocational preparation.

5.2 PERSONAL QUALITIES

The most frequently mentioned area of improvement needed by school leavers has been termed "attitude", and was noted by 42% of employers. The emphasis here was on a positive approach to work and included qualities such as enthusiasm, application, industriousness, self-discipline and general motivation. Respect and courtesy towards others, particularly seniors was seen as another factor in school leavers' general attitude to the work situation, and was therefore included in this category. Private employers in particular stressed the need for improvement in general attitude.

Two closely related aspects of the personal impression created by the school leaver have been termed "personal presentation - appearance" and "personal presentation - manner".

28% of the employers considered that 'appearance' was a major area of improvement needed by school leavers. This included standards of dress, cleanliness, neatness and the overall impression created by the young person, and was stressed particularly by private employers. 'Long hair' was mentioned by only a few employers as a problem with school leavers' appearance - perhaps this is now more generally accepted.

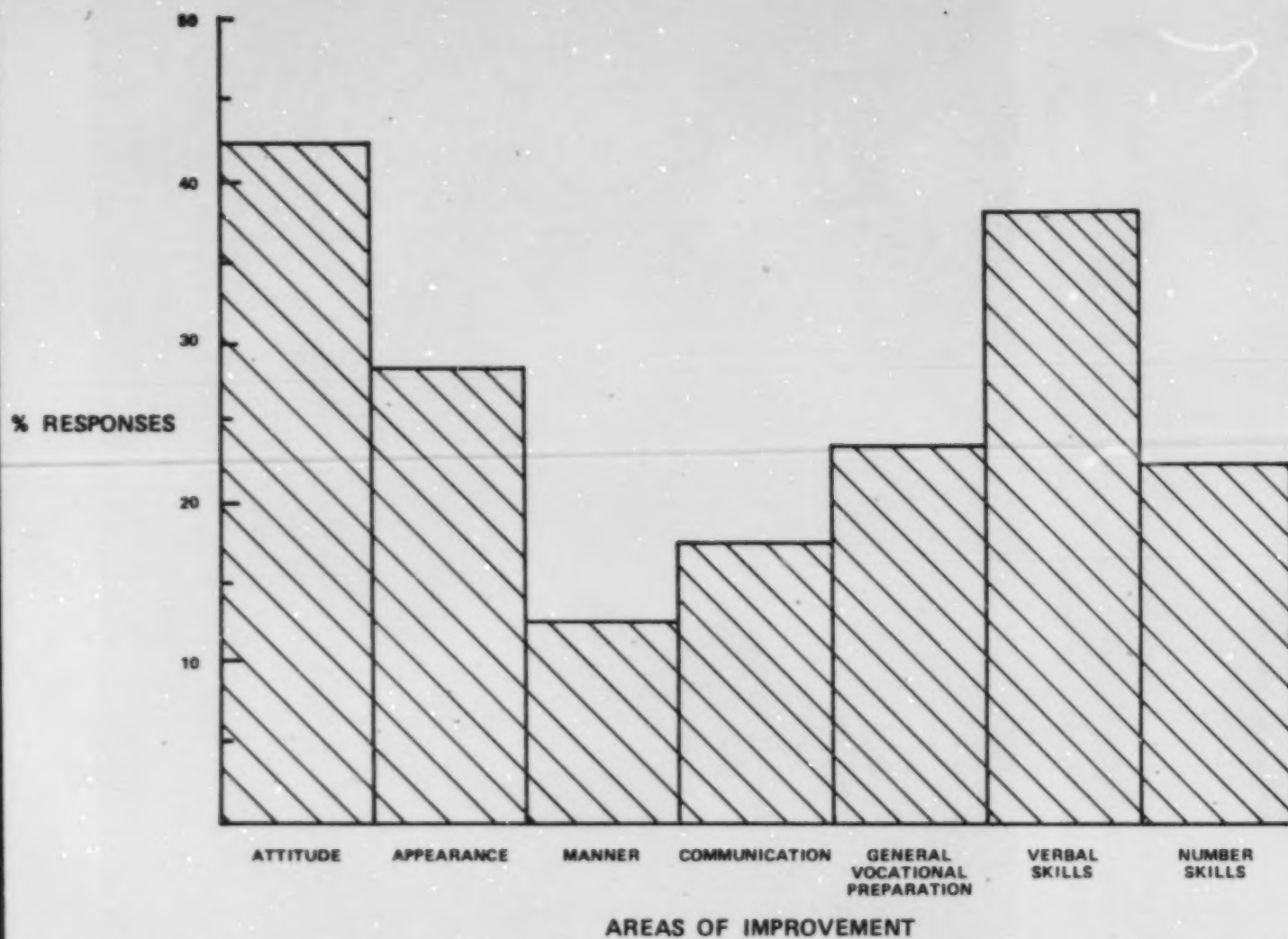


FIGURE 4. AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT SOUGHT BY EMPLOYERS

The group of comments categorized as "manner" related to the personal impression created by the applicant and included confidence, common-sense, patience, stability and maturity.

A group of comments categorized as "communication-speech" had both personal and educational aspects, and was mentioned by 17% of employers. This included oral expression, the ability to speak clearly and be understood, and comprehension of instructions, and was important both in the interview situation and on the job.

From the information obtained on problems relating to specific skills and attributes those most often rated as problems were: initiative, self-confidence and the ability to work without supervision, rated 'often' a problem by 29% of employers and 'sometimes' a problem by 62% of employers. These attributes were considered to be particularly important and most often a problem with shop assistants.

The ability to work with and be considerate of others was rated 'often' a problem by 13% of employers and 'sometimes' a problem by 62% of employers.

A sense of responsibility, respect for authority and loyalty to the employer were rated 'often' a problem by 33% of employers and 'sometimes' a problem by 40% of employers. These were problem areas particularly with shop assistants, apprentices and trainee/cadets and were similar to the "attitude" category described above.

Punctuality and diligence were found to be 'often' a problem by 21% of employers and 'sometimes' a problem by 49%, again, particularly with shop assistants, trainee/cadets and apprentices.

Acceptable standards of dress, appearance and hygiene were found to be 'often' a problem by 20% of employers and 'sometimes' a problem by 48% of employers.

It is possible that greater attention was paid by employers to the personal qualities of shop assistants because of their direct contact with the public in the work situation.

Overall, about two thirds of the employers in the larger enterprises found problems with the personal qualities of the school leavers they employed.

In the smaller businesses, while employers were satisfied with the particular school leavers they currently employed, they considered that many young people were lacking in qualities of conscientiousness, responsibility, diligence and self-discipline. Some also commented on the untidy appearance of many young people. However, they also considered that young people of today were more mature and confident than those of a few years ago.

5.3 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

The second most frequently mentioned area of improvement needed by school leaver applicants has been termed "general verbal skills" and was noted by 38% of employers. This related mainly to standards of literacy and in particular to written communication, including spelling, handwriting, reading, and following of written instructions. State government departments, employing a large number of clerical staff, emphasized improvement needed in this area.

22% of employers considered that improvement was needed in the area of "general number skills", with criticism of the increasing use of calculators in schools. Private employers in particular noted the inability of many young people to perform simple arithmetic calculations. As one employer commented: "To put it simply : while they are preoccupied in trying to work out 7×7 , they are unable to grasp the things you are trying to teach them in relation to the job".

From the information obtained on problems with specific skills and attributes the area presenting most problems was that of written communication - including handwriting, simple letter or report-writing etc. 48% of employers rated this "often" a problem and a further 36% "sometimes" a problem with school leavers currently and recently employed.

Both oral communication (speech, use of telephone, message-taking etc.) and general number skills were rated 'often' a problem by 30% of employers and 'sometimes' a problem by 49%.

Even the basic skill of reading was rated 'often' a problem by 13% of employers and 'sometimes' a problem by 43%.

These views are consistent with reports in the media in which employers are critical of the standards of literacy and numeracy of school leavers. Several employers did point out that the young people of today probably receive a better all-round education but lack a solid grasp of the fundamentals in verbal and number skills.

In order to check the consistency of employers views across various types of school leaver position, a crosstabulation of responses relating the level of education required for school leaver positions and employers ratings of the problems with particular skills and attributes was carried out.

It would perhaps be expected that the educational attainment areas discussed above would be more likely to be seen as problems where the school leavers were employed in positions requiring minimum standards, and that problems would decrease with rising levels of education. This was borne out to some extent but in general views were fairly consistent regardless of the level of education required for the job. A more detailed survey involving greater numbers of respondents would be necessary to establish the generality of these views.

The employers in the smaller businesses expressed similar views to those in the larger enterprises, emphasizing that young people today did appear to be receiving a broader general education than they were a few years ago, but lacked a solid grounding in the basic skills of literacy and numeracy. Some mentioned the need to check carefully any written work or arithmetic calculations carried out by the young people they employed.

5.4 VOCATIONAL PREPARATION

24% of the employers currently employing school leavers considered that a major area of improvement needed by young applicants was that of 'general vocational preparation'. This incorporated three main and related areas:

- (a) Lack of preparation for employment interviews. Many young people were apparently not well informed about the job(s) for which they applied and did not bring school reports, references and other necessary material with them. Several employers also commented on the poor quality of written job

applications. They felt that young people should be taught how to write a standard job application stating all the relevant particulars neatly and concisely.

- (b) Lack of awareness of the world of work, and of what would be expected of them on taking up employment. Employers considered that students would benefit from preparation for the realities of the world of work. As one remarked: "Young people are totally unprepared for the need to work eight hours a day".
- (c) Lack of vocational guidance, in particular the school leaver's knowledge of the range of careers available and the personal and educational requirements of different careers. Some employers commented that students often pursued subjects totally unrelated to their careers, particularly with respect to the trades. However, this may be a reflection of the narrow approach being taken by employers as the intention of students' choice of optional subjects is to give them the opportunity of learning for interest outside the required 'core' subjects.

Some employers reported experiencing problems with school leavers in their commitment to taking on additional study. Apparently a number of young people lost interest in their courses, possibly because of uncertainty about their actual choice of career. These often left to seek alternative employment.

Employers in the smaller businesses also considered that school leavers were not prepared for the realities of the world of work; for the need to be punctual, to work hard, explain absences, etc. The standard of written job applications was criticised, and similar comments to those of the employers in the larger enterprises were made on poor presentation at job interviews.

Overall, it appears that employers would like young people to be given more realistic vocational preparation. The extension of work-experience schemes was advocated by several employers as one way of achieving this.

5.5 SCHOOL LEAVERS OF TODAY COMPARED WITH THOSE OF FIVE YEARS AGO

Employers were asked how they would rate school leavers of today compared

with those of about five years ago in terms of -

- (a) Literacy (reading, writing, spelling)
- (b) Numeracy (number skills)
- (c) Other job-related skills
- (d) Attitude to the job

Results are given in Table 14.

TABLE 14
SCHOOL LEAVERS OF TODAY COMPARED WITH THOSE
OF FIVE YEARS AGO

ENTERPRISES EMPLOYING SCHOOL LEAVERS									
RESPONSE CATEGORY	LITERACY		NUMERACY		OTHER JOB-RELATED SKILLS		ATTITUDE TO THE JOB		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Significantly better	-		2	0.9	1	0.5	2	0.9	
Better	18	8.2	36	16.4	41	18.6	20	9.1	
About the same	69	31.5	104	47.5	114	52.1	60	27.4	
Worse	86	39.3	42	19.2	23	10.5	75	34.3	
Significantly worse	25	11.4	9	4.1	1	.5	39	17.8	
Don't know	5	2.3	8	3.7	16	7.3	6	2.7	
No response	16	7.3	18	8.2	23	10.5	17	7.8	
TOTAL	219	100.0	219	100.0	219	100.0	219	100.0	

Several employers expressed reluctance to generalise about standards of school leavers on the basis of those that they employed. However, a fairly clear overall view prevailed, as can be seen from the table above.

The two areas in which school leavers were seen to have changed least in the last 5 years were in standards of numeracy and other job-related skills. Some 50% of employers in each case rated these as being 'about the same', while a smaller proportion saw these two areas as being either better or worse than 5 years ago. In spite of changes to the approach of teaching mathematics and some adverse comments about the increasing use of calculators, no significant changes in numeracy standards were observed by employers.

The fact that "other job-related skills" were rated as about the same or better than five years ago affords recognition of the increased emphasis being placed in schools on practical preparation for employment. Most government secondary schools now have a pre-vocational centre for this purpose.

It was in the areas of literacy and attitude to the job that employers rated most change taking place over the last five years, in both cases for the worse. This is clearly indicated in Figure 5 below.

The low standard of written and verbal communication was continually criticised by employers, who considered this to be one of the most important requirements for a wide variety of positions. 39% of employers rated standards of literacy as 'worse' and 11% "significantly worse" than 5 years ago. No clear reasons were put forward for the perceived decline in standards, though many felt that there was too much tendency in schools to "let the child do his own thing" and not enough insistence on achieving a high level of competency in written and verbal areas.

Consistent with responses to other questions, it was particularly in relation to "attitude to the job" that employers observed a decline. Only 27% of employers rated this as 'about the same' as 5 years ago, while 34% rated attitude as worse and 18% rated it as significantly worse. Private employers strongly endorsed this view with 26% rating attitude as significantly worse and 37% rating it as worse than 5 years ago.

Of the 9% of employers who rated attitude as 'better', most qualified this by pointing out that current levels of unemployment caused many school leavers to value their jobs more so it was expected that their attitudes would be better.

As indicated previously, a positive, willing attitude was the quality considered most important by employers when selecting applicants for a job. The school, the home, the media and society in general were recognised as contributing to the 'attitude' of school leavers. School leavers of today were seen as being more critical than those of 5 years ago (often too much so), as being over-confident, lacking discipline, intolerant and discontented

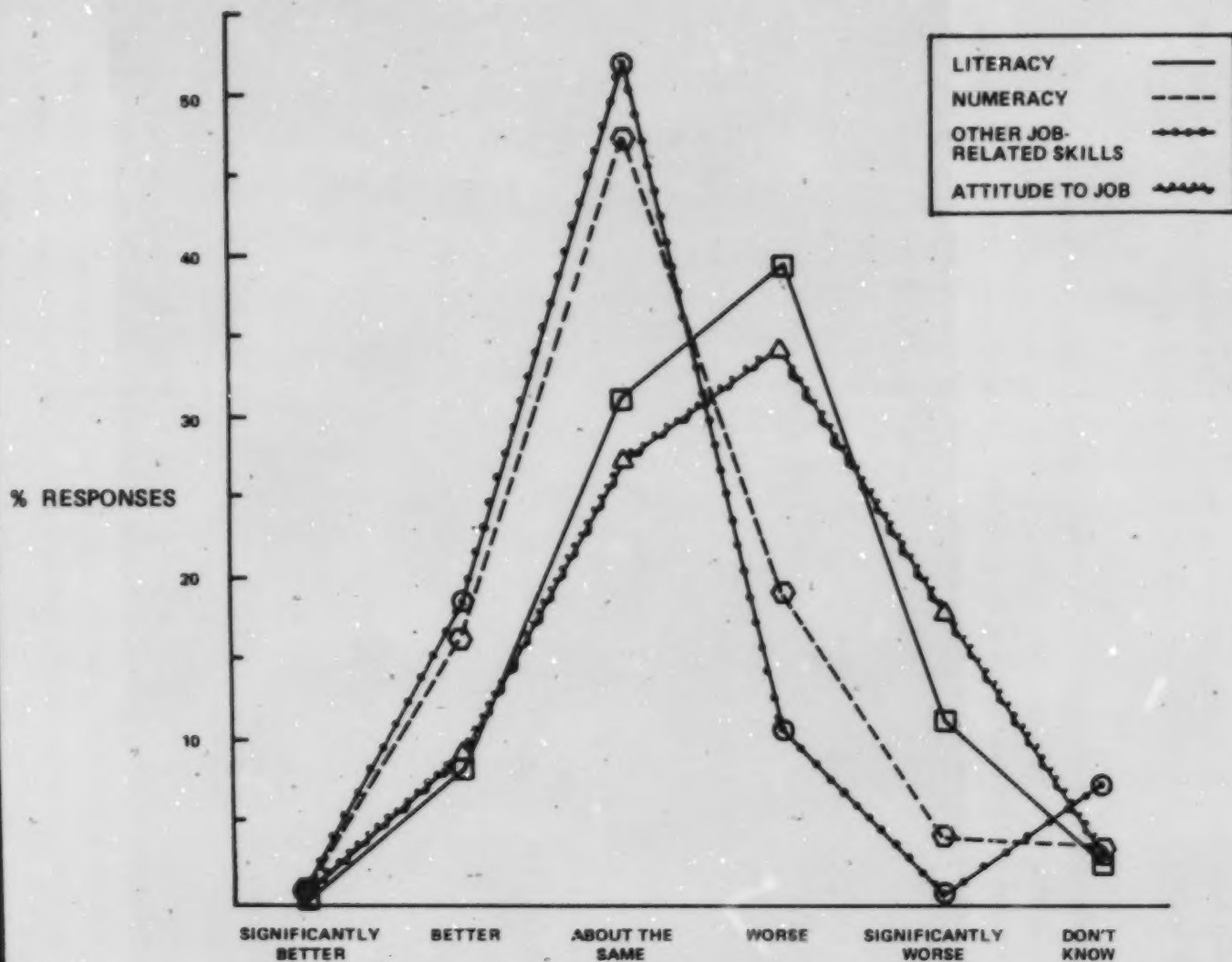


FIGURE 5. SCHOOL LEAVERS OF TODAY COMPARED WITH SCHOOL LEAVERS OF FIVE YEARS AGO

when required to do basic, routine work, and as lacking in motivation and ambition. Many students were considered to be only interested in obtaining "the dole". Some employer comments included the following:-

- "even with so-called mass unemployment it is very difficult even to get students to interview, and as stated, attitude restricts the suitability of many who do apply."
- "in certain areas, their only mathematical knowledge is the difference between their starting wages and the dole. The idea of Saturday morning work is almost sacrilege."

It was often pointed out by employers that changes in basic and job-related skills, and in attitudes, would be more evident if they had been asked to rate these over a longer period of time, for example 10 years. While some employers noted that many students were staying on at school for years 11 and 12 because of the difficulty in obtaining jobs, they did not translate this trend into its inevitable consequence; that is, because more people are staying on longer at school, the quality of the early leavers would be expected to be generally lower than that of 5 or 10 years ago. Only those for whom school has become irrelevant, or who need to work for financial reasons, or who have a definite job prospect such as an apprenticeship, are likely to leave school at the minimum age. This aside, employers were clearly concerned about what they saw as a decline in standards of literacy and in attitude to the job.

Employers in the smaller businesses were reluctant to generalise about school leavers on the basis of the few that they employed. Of those who did give an opinion, most regarded standards of literacy and numeracy as worse than they were five years ago. None of the employers considered that these were better.

All of the employers who expressed views considered the attitude to the job of today's school leavers to be worse or significantly worse than five years ago. Some related the untidy appearance of many young people to this deterioration in attitude. One employer referred to this trend as "the cult of the unclean". Another stated, "attitude is much more casual and this is reflected in the poor standard of dress".

While these employers held rather unfavourable views of school leavers in general, they were nevertheless satisfied with the particular young people they employed.

CHAPTER 6

EMPLOYER OPINIONS OF THE ADEQUACY OF SCHOOLING FOR EMPLOYMENT

Employers were asked a number of questions in which they were able to express opinions on the adequacy of schooling in preparing young people for employment.

One of the key questions was that in which employers were asked: "In which areas (knowledge, skills, attitudes) are the schools a) most effective and b) least effective in preparing young people for employment with you? A comparison of the areas in which schools were considered to be most effective and least effective is shown in Figure 6.

There was no real consensus of opinion among employers on the areas in which schools were most effective and least effective in preparing young people for employment. In fact 19 employers (9%) specifically stated that there were no areas in which the schools were effective in carrying out this task.

The response rate for this question was relatively low, with more employers offering comments in the 'least effective' than the 'most effective' category, indicating that employers found more to criticise than eulogise in the school's role in preparing young people for employment.

When responses were broken down by size and type of employer, no significant trends emerged. Therefore results will be discussed briefly in terms of work attitudes, educational attainment and vocational preparation.

6.1 WORK ATTITUDES

Apart from a few isolated comments on the greater self-confidence shown by young people of today, 'attitude' was generally considered to be the major area in which schools were least effective in preparing young people for employment. This view was expressed by 87 employers (40% of the possible total and more than 50% of those who responded to this question.) The components of this have already been discussed and include motivation, application, respect for seniors, sense of responsibility and self-discipline.

Clearly some employers considered that the school plays an important part

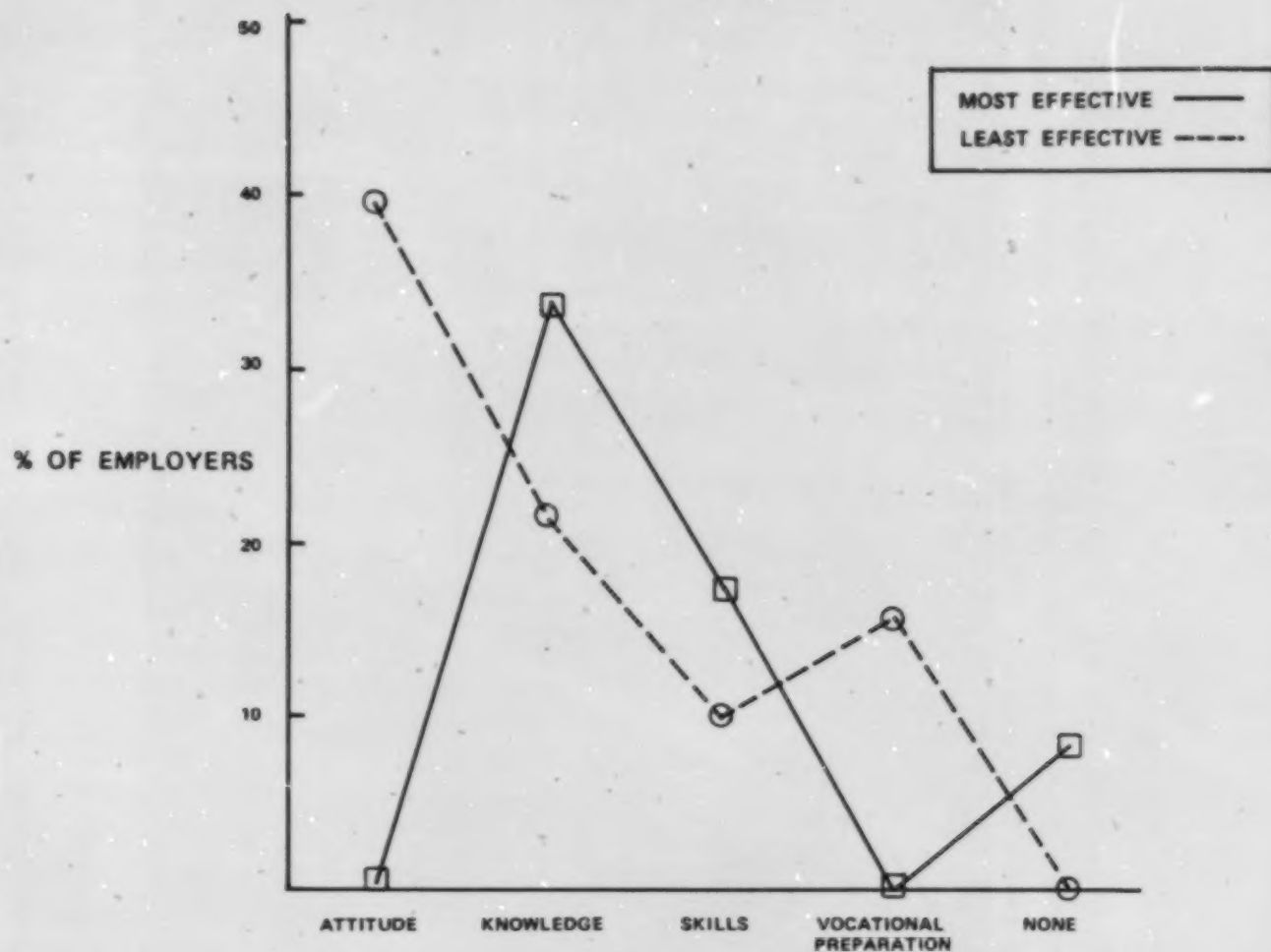


FIGURE 6. EFFECTIVENESS OF SCHOOLS IN PREPARING YOUNG PEOPLE FOR EMPLOYMENT

in the development of acceptable work attitudes in students. Several would like a return to the times when more importance was attached to manners, grooming and discipline.

Employers in the smaller businesses, while generally more reluctant to express opinions on the adequacy of schooling for employment, also commented on the more 'casual' attitude of today's school leavers. They attributed this partly to a lack of emphasis on discipline at school.

6.2 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Conflicting views on this area were evident. 34% of employers rated 'knowledge' as the area in which schools were *most* effective in preparing young people for employment. Knowledge here was interpreted in a global sense, that is giving students a broad general knowledge of social issues and world affairs. As noted earlier in this report (Section 5.3), many employers considered that students are receiving a much better general education than they were a few years ago.

However, 22% of employers rated "knowledge" as the area in which schools were least effective. When rated this way, knowledge was interpreted more specifically as basic literacy and numeracy. Several employers commented on the need for greater emphasis to be placed on "the three R's" and considered that basic education standards had fallen in the last five years. There was particular emphasis on the need for schools to improve their teaching of communication skills, both oral and written, backed up by comments on the poor standard of written applications and presentation at job interviews.

Employers in the smaller businesses also considered that today's school leavers were well educated in a broad sense, but lacked a solid grasp of the fundamentals of literacy and numeracy. Several commented that schools today emphasized the importance of ideas. This approach was considered to have advantages providing that basic skills were not neglected.

6.3 VOCATIONAL PREPARATION

35 employers (16%) considered that the schools were least effective in the area of general vocational preparation such as awareness of work

requirements, types of jobs available and presentation at employment interviews. None of the employers considered this as an area in which schools were "most effective".

The term "skills" was rather loosely defined by employers and included specific and general work-related skills such as shorthand, typing and manual training. This was rated as an area in which schools were 'most effective' by 17% of employers and 'least effective' by 10% of employers. A more detailed examination of the meaning attached by employers to the term 'skills' would be desirable.

Additional information on vocational preparation was provided by responses to the question: "To what extent do schools give adequate attention to the preparation of students for employment?" Results are given in Table 15.

TABLE 15
ADEQUACY OF ATTENTION BY SCHOOLS TO THE PREPARATION
OF STUDENTS FOR EMPLOYMENT

Response Category	Enterprises employing school leavers	
	N	%
Too little	129	58.9
About right	35	16.0
Too much	0	0
Don't know	46	21.0
No response	9	4.1
TOTAL	219	100.0

59% of the employers considered that schools were not giving sufficient attention to the preparation of students for employment. Private employers held this opinion more strongly and were more likely to express an opinion than state and commonwealth government employers. The fact that 21% responded "don't know" is not unexpected in view of the high percentage of employers who indicated that they were "not very familiar" with the types of courses offered by schools.

Several employers felt that schools placed too much emphasis on academic achievement and did not give sufficient encouragement to students to pursue more practically oriented careers. As one commented: "Some teachers don't seem to appreciate that there is a useful role in all societies for some students with little academic ambition."

More direct involvement in the form of school visits and work experience programmes was advocated as a means of overcoming these problems. It was suggested that it would be advantageous for teachers to have the opportunity of working outside the school situation so that they could give a more realistic picture to students.

6.4 ASSESSMENT AND REPORTING

Employers were asked to indicate their satisfaction or otherwise with current methods of school assessment and reporting. Responses are given in Table 16.

TABLE 16
EMPLOYER SATISFACTION WITH SCHOOL ASSESSMENT AND REPORTING

Response Category	Enterprises employing school leavers	
	N	%
Very satisfied	7	3.2
Satisfied	122	55.7
Not very satisfied	62	28.3
No response	28	12.8
TOTAL	219	100.0

Only 3% of the employers indicated that they were 'very satisfied' with current methods of school assessment and reporting. Just over half (56%) were 'satisfied' while 28% were not very satisfied. Private employers appeared to be less satisfied with current methods of school assessment and reporting than state and commonwealth government employers. This is shown clearly in Figure 7.

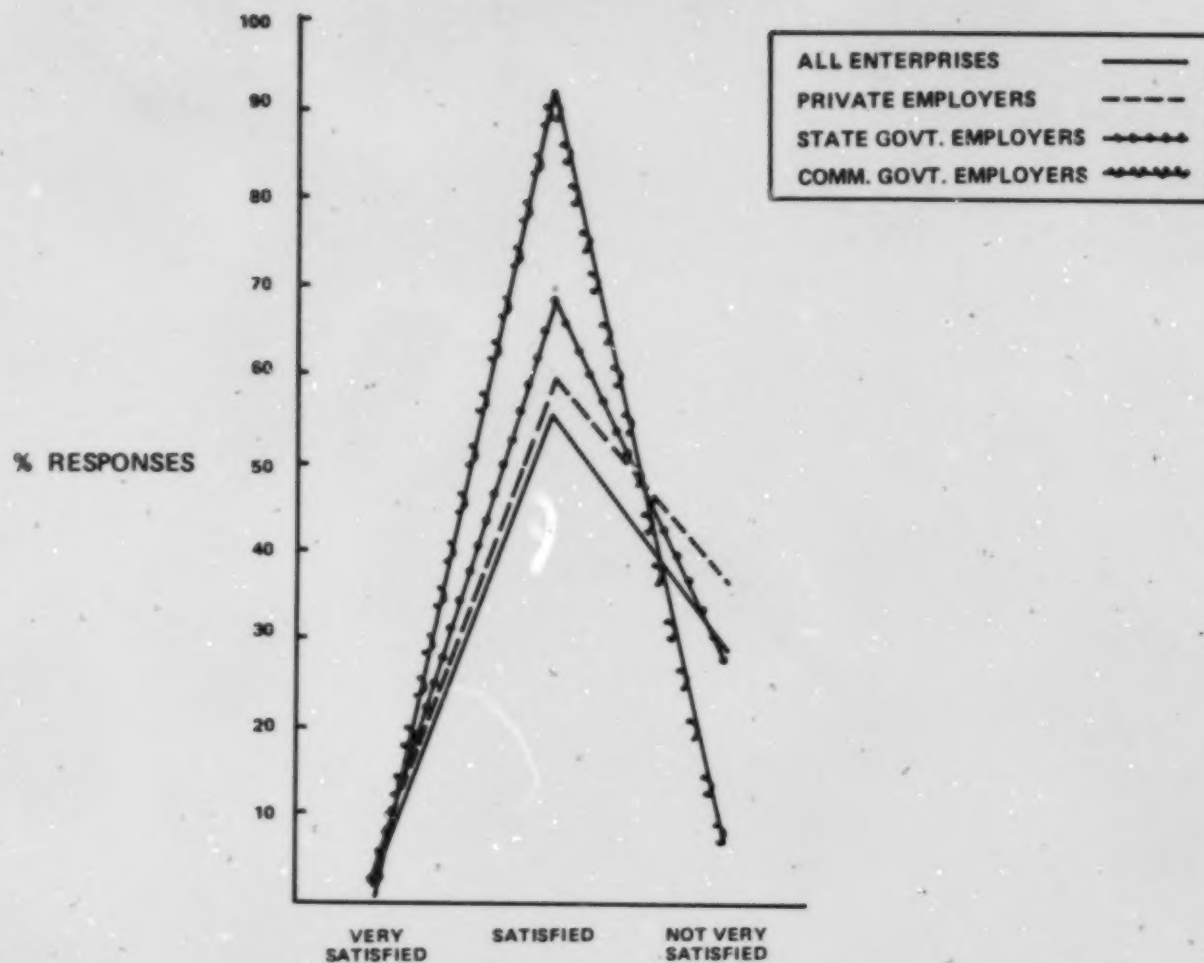


FIGURE 7. LEVELS OF SATISFACTION WITH CURRENT METHODS OF SCHOOL ASSESSMENT AND REPORTING

When results were analysed by size of enterprise, the employers in smaller enterprises (those employing less than 50 personnel) were less likely to be satisfied than those in larger enterprises. One possible explanation of this could be that employers in the smaller enterprises may be more likely to rely on school assessments and reports in the selection of school leavers for employment, as these enterprises did not use aptitude tests or specific entry tests.

Some of the changes employers would like to see implemented are discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 7

EMPLOYERS AND EDUCATIONAL PLANNING

7.1 EMPLOYER FAMILIARITY WITH SCHOOL COURSES

Employers were asked how they would rate their familiarity with the types of courses offered by schools. Responses are given in Table 17.

TABLE 17
FAMILIARITY WITH SCHOOL COURSES

Response Category	Enterprises currently employing school leavers	
	N	%
Very familiar	17	7.8
Quite familiar	108	49.3
Not very familiar	90	41.1
No response	4	1.8
TOTAL	219	100.0

A large proportion of the employers (41%) indicated that they were 'not very familiar' with the types of courses offered by schools. Only 17 employers (8%) considered that they were 'very familiar' with these and the remaining 50% were 'quite familiar'.

Employers currently taking part in work-experience programmes were generally more familiar with the types of courses offered by schools.

Most of the employers in the smaller enterprises indicated that they were not very familiar with school courses. This is an area of concern to the Confederation of W.A. Industry, and the Board of Secondary Education is providing information through a newsletter to small businesses.

7.2 EMPLOYER PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATIONAL PLANNING

Only about 55% of the employers responded to the question of whether employers should be consulted in educational planning. Of those who did, the majority indicated that they would like to be consulted, in fact more so than at present. Suggestions for ways in which this consultation could take place were :-

- Consultation between employer organizations and the State Education Department.
- Direct consultation with employers.

c. Independent surveys of employers views.

The most frequently mentioned way of including employers in educational planning was by consultation between the State Education Department and employer organizations such as the Confederation of W.A. Industry, Perth Chamber of Commerce, the various trade associations etc. It seems that some employers are not aware of the extent to which such consultations are already taking place.

Some preferred direct consultation between the State Education Department and employers and between schools and potential employers of their students, with the resulting advantages on matters of resources and requirements. Several of these employers appeared to consider that their views may not be accurately represented by the employer organizations.

Despite the fact that a few employers had commented adversely on the proliferation of surveys currently taking place on various matters, 26 employers specifically suggested surveys as a means of obtaining information for use in educational planning.

Employers also suggested two main ways in which they could assist schools in the preparation of students for employment.

The first was in the general provision of information to schools on job opportunities and the personal and educational requirements for particular jobs. This would be done by distribution of relevant literature, (pamphlets, handbooks, etc.), films, tapes, and visits by representatives of enterprises to the schools to give talks and acquaint both students and school staff with local job opportunities. The need for a regular, up-to-date and continual flow of information between employers and schools was stressed.

The second way in which employers suggested they could assist was by the direct involvement of students in the work situation. Work-experience programmes which are already operating, where students are released from school for a period of one or two weeks, were considered most valuable in this respect.

Other suggested ways of introducing students to the actualities of the work situation included lowering the minimum employment age to enable

young people to work on a casual basis on Saturday mornings or after school; and visits/tours of work areas giving students the opportunity to observe and talk with both workers and employers. This was well illustrated by the following comment; "Apart from work-experience programmes, this company also accepts small groups of 6 to 8 students for a 4 hour period during working hours. They are handed to the manager in pairs, e.g. 2 to the typing pool, 2 to the woodwork area, 2 to metal work, just to look around and ask questions under the supervision of the foreman. These short period observation visits are very popular with the local high school."

Although the main emphasis on direct work experience was with students, many employers thought that teachers also could benefit from some kind of first-hand experience. Teachers would then have the knowledge and understanding of the workplace to enable a more realistic and relevant preparation of students for employment.

7.3 CHANGES DESIRED

Employers were asked to give their opinion on desirable changes in schooling, in particular

- changes in current methods of school assessment and reporting, and
- changes in the content and emphasis of teaching in the schools.

(a) CHANGES DESIRED IN CURRENT METHODS OF SCHOOL ASSESSMENT AND REPORTING (Figure 8)

Only about half the employers surveyed expressed an opinion. For those who did, a variety of suggestions was made.

The most frequently mentioned change desired was for more information to be given in school reports on student qualities other than academic performance. These included personal qualities, attitude to work and aptitude for selected careers. This opinion confirmed the importance attached by employers to the personal qualities and general attitude of young people.

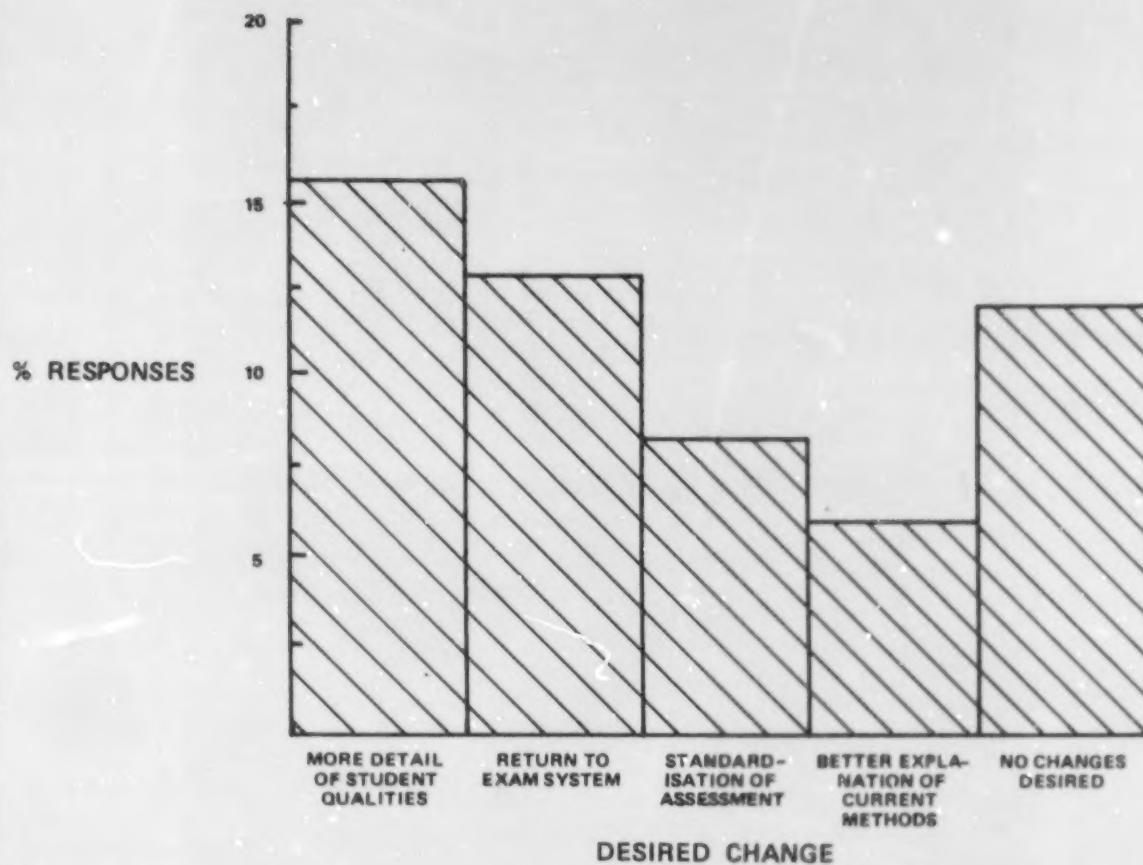


FIGURE 8. CHANGES DESIRED IN METHODS OF SCHOOL ASSESSMENT AND REPORTING

13% of the employers would like to see a reversion to a more formal external examination system such as the old Junior Certificate. They consider that this was fairer to students in eliminating teacher bias and allowed a universal standard to be set for judging students. Another point made in favour of this was the need for greater opportunity to assess the student's performance under stress. As one employer commented; "the old examination system may not have assessed a student's intellectual capacity too well, but it did measure performance under stress and the ability to cope with real life situations."

Related to the above was the expressed desire for greater standardisation of assessments between and within different schools. While recognizing that the Achievement Certificate system is intended to provide relativity on a state-wide basis, many employers were of the opinion that there was considerable variation in standards between schools and that the only way to overcome this would be by a reversion to the previous pass-fail, percentage value system. It seems that many employers are not aware of the comprehensive system of moderation by the Board of Secondary Education designed to ensure equivalence of standards and assessment as far as possible.

A small percentage of employers requested better explanation and more information on current methods of school assessment and reporting.

In spite of the fact that 28% of the employers had previously indicated that they were "not very satisfied" with current methods of school assessment and reporting, 12% (34 employers) specifically stated that they did not wish to see any changes in current methods.

(b) CHANGES DESIRED IN THE CONTENT AND EMPHASIS OF TEACHING IN THE SCHOOLS (Figure 9)

The response rate to this question was also low, with many employers considering that they were not in a position to comment because of insufficient knowledge. This was confirmed in responses to the question in which more than 40% of the employers rated themselves as 'not very familiar' with the types of courses offered by schools.

There were two main areas in which employers desired changes. The

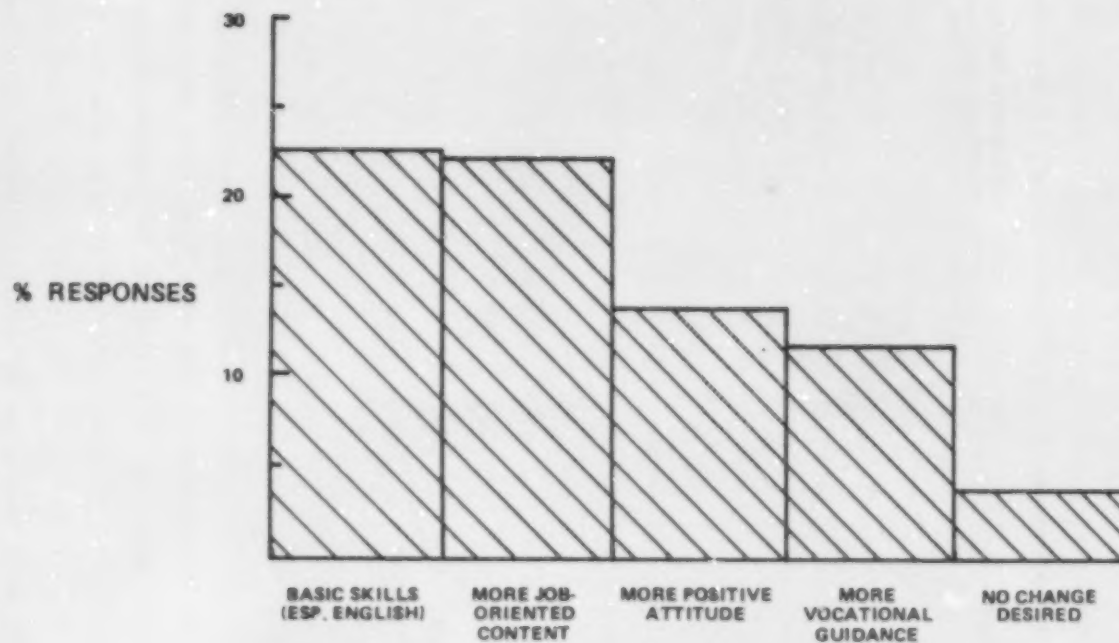


FIGURE 9. CHANGES DESIRED IN THE CONTENT AND EMPHASIS OF TEACHING IN THE SCHOOLS

first was for greater emphasis to be placed on teaching the basic skills of literacy and numeracy, particularly verbal skills.

The second was a desire for more job-oriented content in the curriculum, including the need for a greater awareness by both students and teachers of the world of work outside the school. It was suggested that teachers could be encouraged to participate in industry through work-release programmes and by establishing regular contact with business representatives. This would allow teachers to assess the learning skills which would be of greatest practical benefit to young people in the work situation.

The third change desired was for the school to encourage the development of a more positive attitude to work, emphasizing discipline, responsibility, courtesy and effort. However, it was pointed out that the home has an equal responsibility with the school in developing these attributes.

The need for improvement in the vocational guidance available for students was mentioned again with emphasis on the desirability of early awareness and planning for careers. It was felt that too often young people left the decision about the type of job they might undertake until shortly before leaving school. Employers considered that career education and planning should be a continual process and not a last minute decision as appeared to be the case with many young people.

Only a small percentage of employers (4%) specifically stated that they did not consider any changes necessary. In responding to this question employers stressed the skills and attributes which would help the young person adapt and fit into the work situation.

In view of the fact that employers were given an open invitation to express opinions on desirable changes in assessment and reporting and the content and emphasis of teaching in the schools, it was perhaps surprising that only about 50% chose to do so.

Because of their limited knowledge of schools and school leavers in general, employers in the smaller businesses were reluctant to make suggestions on what might be done to improve preparation of students for employment.

Several considered that a better grounding in oral and written communication and in number skills should be provided, and that schools should place greater emphasis on discipline than at present.

In the area of vocational preparation, employers considered that schools could do more to advise students on how to apply for jobs and how to handle an employment interview. It was suggested that opportunities for students to obtain a more realistic understanding of the world of work by visiting various work establishments or by some form of work-experience scheme should be encouraged at all levels.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

This concluding chapter will focus upon :-

- (i) issues arising from the findings of the survey;
- (ii) State Education Department initiatives and practices aimed at improving the vocational function of schooling;
- (iii) areas for further research and investigation.

8.1 ISSUES ARISING FROM THE FINDINGS

These will be discussed in the order of the summary presented in Section 1.5 of this report.

1. The survey revealed a wide variety of recruitment policies and practices with notable differences between private and government employers, and between large and small enterprises.

In selecting applicants for employment, government and larger enterprises were more likely to use general aptitude tests, specific entry tests, and information other than that obtained in a personal interview. These employers were also more likely to be satisfied with their school leaver employees. A simple explanation of this could be that the selection process acts as a successful screening device.

However, positions in government and larger enterprises are those with well specified educational pre-requisites, so it could be argued that a better calibre of young person is being attracted. While it was not the intention of the survey to investigate in detail the recruitment procedures of the enterprises in the sample, it did appear that in many instances selection was haphazard, and that improved selection methods may result in a better match between employer and employee.

2. A related issue is that of the training and counselling of young people in employment. It seems that only the larger private enterprises currently provide career information, planned induction and training schemes and incentives for further study comparable to that available in the government sector.

Government and larger enterprises are also more likely to employ designated personnel and/or training officers to perform the counselling and training function. While the existence of more formalised programmes would appear to be advantageous, it would be desirable to assess also the effectiveness of less formal counselling and unplanned on-the-job training. The whole question of the responsibility of employers in the provision of adequate training and counselling for young workers is one which needs to be examined.

3. The significance attached to the personal qualities of young applicants for positions was evident across the whole spectrum of employers surveyed, with strong emphasis on the "attitude" factor. This suggests a need for a deeper investigation of the dimensions of this, particularly in the light of a perceived deterioration in the attitude of school leavers of today compared with those of about five years ago. More than 50% of the employers surveyed rated 'attitude' as worse or significantly worse than five years ago, and this view was applicable to all levels of school leaver positions.

Employers recognized that the home, the media, the community and society all influence the formation of the attitudes of young people. However, they considered that schools have a significant role to play in the development of positive work attitudes, and regarded this as the area in which schools were least effective in the preparation of students for employment.

4. While major importance was attached to the personal qualities of young people, employers also expected a sound training in the basic skills of literacy and numeracy. Such requirements were usually stated in general terms and there was considerable variation in pre-requisite educational levels for supposedly similar positions. One way to improve the selection would be to carry out a detailed investigation of the minimum (or desirable) levels of education required to perform adequately in specified positions.

Lack of consistency was evident also in employers' views on the effectiveness of schools in providing the educational background needed for employment. 34% of the employers surveyed rated "knowledge" as the area in which schools were most effective in preparing young people for employment. In this case, knowledge

was interpreted in a global sense, and as noted previously in this report, employers considered that today's school leavers are receiving a better general education than they were a few years ago.

However, 22% of the employers surveyed rated "knowledge" as the area in which schools were *least* effective in preparing young people for employment. Here, knowledge was described more specifically as the basic skills of literacy and numeracy, with emphasis on the need for schools to improve the teaching of communication skills, both oral and written. When comparing school leavers of today with those of about five years ago, more than 50% of the employers rated current standards of literacy as worse or significantly worse. These views were held regardless of the educational level of school leaver. On the other hand, despite some adverse comments about the increasing use of calculators in schools, standards of numeracy were considered to have changed little in the past five years.

While employers' observations on levels of literacy are not backed up by the most recent research on standards in Australia as a whole¹⁵ their concern should be heeded by education authorities and attempts made to specify and remedy particular areas of weakness.

The employers surveyed did not expect that young people coming direct from secondary school should necessarily possess sufficient skills to immediately undertake positions without requiring some period of job familiarisation and training. They did, however, expect school leavers to at least have some general understanding of their responsibilities on taking up employment, and, in particular, to have some idea of what they were looking for in a job.

5. The major "gap" between employer expectations and perceptions of school leavers appeared to be in their general work attitudes, their appearance and manner, and their basic educational attainments, particularly verbal skills. While criticising such behaviour characteristics as intolerance and discontent when required to carry out routine tasks and lack of motivation and ambition; nothing was said about the mindless, boring jobs which many young people are forced to enter when they leave school. One extreme and often-quoted example is that of the person stuffing frozen chickens into plastic bags. Would it be reasonable to expect enthusiasm and motivation for such a task? It seems that employers also may have to come to terms

with the realities of the work situation and endeavour to "humanize" jobs by providing opportunities for flexibility in hours of work, and a sense of personal involvement in the organization and completion of tasks.

6. With the exception of skills required for office positions, employers did not expect school leavers to have specific vocational training.

However, three main areas of improvement in the general pre-vocational preparation of young people were suggested:-

- (i) better information to be provided about types of jobs, preparation for employment interviews and applications for jobs;
- (ii) a need for greater awareness of the world of work and responsibilities on taking up employment;
- (iii) increased access to vocational guidance to enable a more realistic and informed choice of career.

The value of these suggestions is not questioned. Nevertheless, there is a dilemma in that even a student with "ideal" pre-vocational preparation and information must face up to the reality of the employment situation. With current high levels of unemployment, particularly among youth, the situation for many young people is such that any job is better than no job at all.

7. The fact that 40% of the employers surveyed indicated that they were "not very familiar" with the types of courses offered by schools, indicates a serious lack of communication. Details will be given in the following section of this report of some of the State Education Department initiatives in this area. It does seem that if employers are prepared to offer criticism of the outcomes of schooling, they should likewise be prepared to obtain accurate information about what is actually going on in schools.

The following changes in the content or emphasis of teaching in the schools were suggested by employers:-

- (i) more emphasis on the basic skills, particularly verbal skills;
- (ii) schools to try to develop a more positive attitude to work in students;
- (iii) more job-oriented content to be included in the curriculum;
- (iv) both students and teachers to increase their awareness of the world of work outside school.

75.

The first two suggestions have already been discussed. The provision of more vocationally-oriented options in the curriculum does appear to be desirable and could include preparation for employment interviews and job applications. Such vocational options should also provide opportunities for broadening students' knowledge and experience, and should not merely correspond to predicted future occupations or traditional sex-roles.

Currently operating work-experience schemes (organized by the Youth Education Branch of the State Education Department) are expanding each year and give many young people direct experience in the work situation. Such schemes are favourably regarded by most employers.

The suggestion that teachers could be employed outside the education system on work-release programmes appears worthwhile and has been made by others, including members of the Central Industrial Secretariat¹³. This would present difficulties of organization and practice, but perhaps the State Education Department might consider the feasibility and worth of this suggestion.

8. The majority of employers surveyed accepted the current system of assessment and reporting and only a small proportion (13%) recommended a return to the old examination system and the Junior Certificate. The main changes desired were:-

- (i) the provision in school reports of more details on the personal qualities of students;
- (ii) standardisation of assessment between schools;
- (iii) better explanation of current methods of assessment and reporting.

(ii) and (iii) above will be discussed in Section 8.2 of this report. The first change desired reinforces the importance attached to the personal qualities of young people by employers. However, it also raises the question of whether school reports, issued basically for the information of students and parents, should be used at all by employers in assessing the suitability of applicants. There could be a need for a different type of reporting document to be developed, providing information geared to requirements for employment.

9. The survey indicated a desire for increased consultation between

employers, employer organizations, and the State Education Department. While regular consultations do take place, for example with representatives of the Confederation of W.A. Industry, Perth Chamber of Commerce, Government Departments etc., there may be a need to expand these consultations to include representatives from the small business sector. Further consultation would help to ensure that employers' requirements are given consideration in educational planning, and would help to break down some of the communication barriers currently existing.

10. Employers considered that the best ways they could assist schools in preparing students for employment were by:-
 - (i) the provision of information on job opportunities and the personal and educational requirements for particular jobs;
 - (ii) the direct involvement of students in the work situation through work experience programmes.

A system of regular communications between employers and secondary schools should help to promote a better understanding of each other's needs. Such assistance would be welcomed by most secondary schools, and many already have well-established contacts with local employers through groups such as Rotary, Lions etc.

8.2 STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT INITIATIVES AND PRACTICES AIMED AT IMPROVING THE VOCATIONAL FUNCTION OF SCHOOLING.

While the focus of this study has been on employers views of school leavers and schooling, it is important also to consider some of the initiatives and practices of the State Education Department in the vocational aspects of schooling.

1. *Programmes organized by the Youth Education Branch*

There are currently fifty-three Youth Education Officers in government secondary schools throughout the state. These officers are concerned particularly with the integration of the early school leaver into the community. Many approaches are used in attempting to achieve this, including some or all of the following:-

(i) *Work-experience programmes*

As mentioned earlier in the report, these are now operating in most metropolitan high schools. Figures from the Youth

Education Branch indicate that approximately five thousand young people took part in work experience programmes in 1977. This number does not include other initiatives and contact with employers which may be made by Guidance Officers, Year Masters, Alternative Course Coordinators and Business Studies Teachers.

- (ii) Work observation
- (iii) Factory visits
- (iv) Training in interview techniques
- (v) Guest speakers
- (vi) Visits from career experts
- (vii) Ex-students follow-up
- (viii) Career guidance
- (ix) Career education
- (x) Job-seeking skills

The extension of these activities to include all secondary schools and as many students as possible seems desirable.

2. *Guidance Branch*

All government secondary schools in the metropolitan area and some in country areas have the services of a Guidance Officer (a teacher-trained psychologist). In addition to providing educational and personal counselling, an important part of the Guidance Officer's function is in the vocational area, and many of the initiatives of the Youth Education Officers are carried out in cooperation with Guidance staff. If possible, all students intending to leave school would be interviewed by the Guidance Officer and information provided where necessary. Links with the local branch of the Commonwealth Employment Service are maintained to assist students in finding employment.

Unfortunately, in the current situation of one Guidance Officer to service the needs of approximately twelve hundred students in the high school and two or three contributory primary schools, it is often impossible to achieve more than counselling on a crisis basis. An increase in the number of Guidance staff would allow greater opportunity for planned guidance programmes in which all students could be seen several times during their high school career.

3. Board of Secondary Education

There are a number of initiatives of the Board of Secondary Education aimed at improving communication between employers and the State Education Department and keeping the public informed about changes in school assessment procedures. These include:-

- (i) the publication of pamphlets giving information on the *Achievement Certificate*, *Certificate of Secondary Education*, comparison of results in different school subjects, etc.
- (ii) an information bulletin which is issued regularly : many employers are on the mailing list for this;
- (iii) articles written on request for employer publications;
- (iv) speakers provided on request;
- (v) seminars held twice yearly to inform employers about the Board's activities and any proposed changes in school assessment;
- (vi) a "User Survey" conducted annually, in which views of employers and students are obtained on the appropriateness of the information provided in the *Certificate of Secondary Education*;
- (vii) newspaper advertisements prior to the issuing of the *Achievement Certificate* and the *Certificate of Secondary Education* explaining the details of the respective certificates.

Thus there are opportunities for employers to obtain the latest information on the content and assessment of secondary schooling through the activities of the Board of Secondary Education.

4. Alternative Courses

In the past decade, there has been a considerable growth in the proportion of students continuing at school beyond the compulsory leaving age. Reasons for this growth would include rising expectations of parents, employers, and other sections of the community regarding educational levels of school leavers, and the increasing difficulty experienced by young people in obtaining employment. As a result of this expansion, there are now significant numbers of students entering year 11 for whom the mainstream academic courses leading to the *Tertiary Admissions Examination* (T.A.E.) are not appropriate.

Two major initiatives have been undertaken in order to cater for the varied needs of these students. Alternative course are being

developed by the schools themselves, and alternative subjects have been made available for assessment by the Board of Secondary Education.

(i) *School-based alternative courses - (usually terminal Year 11 courses)*

Currently, such courses have been made available in more than 40% of government senior high schools in W.A. There is considerable diversity in the approaches being used in different schools. Some schools have set up programmes with a definite practical or technical emphasis, designed to cater for students who are planning a delayed entry into one of the trade apprenticeships and need to upgrade their existing qualifications.

Other schools offer courses aimed at extending the students' general education rather than providing any particular pre-vocational training as such.

In addition to catering for a variety of groups of students, the programmes in operation often show marked differences in content, organization and declared purposes.

The Education Department presently operates and certifies a one year business studies course intended chiefly for girls who are hoping to find jobs as clerks and typists. This course, though not strictly school-based is illustrative of the efforts being made by the Education Department to the employment interests of students.

(ii) *Board of Secondary Education*

In 1976, the Board of Secondary Education approved a number of two-year upper-school courses not examined by the *Tertiary Admissions Examination* (T.A.E.). These courses were fully assessed within the schools; though extremely moderated by the Board of Secondary Education. These subjects ranged from animal husbandry, Commercial Law and Current Events to General English, early Childhood Studies and Media Studies. Levels achieved in these approved Board of Secondary Education courses will be reported on the Certificate of Secondary Education issued to students along with levels achieved in courses examined by the T.A.E.

There is some indication of a stabilising in the number of

students continuing at school beyond Year 10. Nevertheless, the alternative courses described above indicate a response by schools to the variety of needs of the changing student population.

5. *Career Education in Schools*

An education officer has been appointed to the Curriculum Branch of the State Education Department with responsibility for developing materials for career education in schools. Part of his function is keeping abreast of career resources and literature, promoting quality resources to schools, and commenting on funding for school-based curriculum proposals in career education.

In addition, this officer is developing career topics for Year 9 and 10 students, emphasizing consciousness of self, career opportunities, and decision-making and job-seeking skills. Following successful trials of the materials in 1977, the course has been given further trialing in twenty eight country and eighteen city high schools during 1978.

6. *Careers Advisors*

In 1976, sixteen 'Careers Advisors' were nominated, mainly from District high schools without the services of a Guidance Officer. These are teachers who have a specified number of periods each week allocated to this function. Training was provided by Guidance Branch, and it is possible that this scheme will be expanded.

Overall, it can be seen that the State Education Department is well aware of its responsibilities in providing for the vocational function of schooling, and is active in keeping abreast of changing needs in this area. It is recognized that there is considerable variation in the importance attached to this function, by individual schools, teachers, guidance officers, parents and students. Nevertheless, in keeping with the importance of problems associated with the transition from school to work, the State Education Department is attempting to play its part.

8.3 AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH AND INVESTIGATION

This study has revealed a number of areas in which further research and investigation appear warranted. Comments will be limited to those areas related to the specific aims of the study, focussing on employer expectations and perceptions of school leavers and employer opinions of schooling.

As noted in the 1977 O.E.C.D. report⁴ there is a lack of statistical information available which would enable systematic research into the problems of transition on a continuing basis. There appears to be a need for one body to coordinate information which can be obtained from a variety of sources and to ensure the prompt release of such information. Accurate statistics on the numbers of school leavers, their level of education, and subsequent employment or unemployment are not at present being kept. This was one of the major problems encountered in the selection of a representative sample of employers.

A partial solution would be for individual secondary schools to accept a degree of responsibility for all their students after they leave school. This would entail keeping a record of the age, education, home background and employment history of students for a period of perhaps one year from the time of leaving school, with this information being supplied to a central body for collation, and release. This should allow an examination of the educational, training and employment experience of successive cohorts of young people as they pass through the education system and enter the labour market.

At the same time, such information should allow the selection of a representative sample of employers so that regular monitoring and follow-up of employers views can be maintained. Without accurate statistical information, it is impossible to carry out reliable research. Once the machinery has been set up, it should be possible to undertake systematic research into the problems of transition on a continuing basis.

At the national level, it has been suggested⁶ that because of the lack of research in Australia on employment, under-employment and unemployment, there is a need to establish a new policy-oriented Employment Research and Development Organization (E.R.D.O.), similar in organization and operation to the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Organization (C.S.I.R.O.). If such a body were to be established, much of the broadly based research suggested above would no doubt be one of its important functions.

The present study concentrated on employers in the metropolitan area only. It would seem desirable to carry out a survey of employers in non-metropolitan areas of W.A. as it seems likely that there will be problems and issues specific to country areas.

The importance attached by employers to the personal qualities of young people and in particular to their 'attitude' points to the need to explore further the dimensions of this variable and to attempt an assessment of the role of the school in inculcating desirable work attitudes in students.

On the question of the educational attainment of school leavers, it seems desirable to ascertain the skills required by those students who enter the workforce direct from secondary school, at least for the major job categories involved. This should enable authorities to determine a) how far the school can go towards providing young people with these skills and b) the responsibility of employers in the training of young people in employment.

There is a need to assess the effectiveness of career education and work-experience programmes for students as they now operate with a view to extending these so that all students have access to such programmes. A pilot study and evaluation of a work-release scheme for teachers to enable them to be employed outside the education system would also be in accord with the recommendations of employers.

Other desirable areas of investigation include a study of 'credentialism' and the way it operates in schools and at work. This study would require a detailed analysis of the selection process used by employers and a study of changes in the minimum educational levels specified for particular jobs over a period of time.



The University of Western Australia

TELEPHONE 80 2394

Department of Education

UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA
NEDLANDS, W.A. 6009
AUGUST, 1977**EMPLOYER SURVEY****SCHOOL LEAVERS****INFORMATION ON HOW TO COMPLETE THE QUESTIONNAIRE**

The questionnaire has four parts — Sections A, B, C and D.

Section A (white) is to be completed by ALL enterprises.

Sections B and C (green) are to be completed by enterprises in which school leavers ARE currently employed.

Section D (pink) is to be completed only by enterprises in which school leavers are NOT currently employed.

The word "enterprise" is used throughout the questionnaire to represent both Government and private employers.

Responses may be given by ticking in the appropriate place or writing your own answers in the space provided.

Please feel free to write extra comments on any of the questions and attach additional sheets and/or other information if you wish.

What is a SCHOOL LEAVER?

Basically, the survey is concerned with employers' views of young people who are coming direct from school to full-time employment. Thus for the purpose of this survey, a SCHOOL LEAVER is defined as a person who —

- (a) has left school (Government or non-Government) sometime after August 1975 to enter the workforce
- and
- (b) is aged 15 to 19 years
- and
- (c) has NOT studied full-time for an extended period at a post-secondary institution. Those who have completed a short commercial course, for example, would still be regarded as school leavers.

If you have any queries regarding this questionnaire or would like further copies sent, would you please telephone the project officer, Mrs. Janet Williams, on 80 2394.

All information will be treated in CONFIDENCE and no employers will be named in the final report.

Please return the completed questionnaire in the reply paid envelope by: 9th September, 1977.

Thank you for your co-operation and assistance in this survey.



The University of Western Australia

Department of Education

TELEPHONE 90 2394

UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA
NEDLANDS, W.A. 6009
AUGUST, 1977

CONFIDENTIAL

EMPLOYER SURVEY

SCHOOL LEAVERS

SECTION A. (To be completed by ALL ENTERPRISES)

1. Name of your enterprise _____

2. Section (if relevant) _____

3. Main purpose of your enterprise _____

(e.g. Furniture manufacturer)

4. Person to contact if we have any queries.

Name _____

Position _____

Telephone Number _____

5. Do you wish to receive a summary of the final report?

Yes _____

No _____

6. Is your enterprise—

Private Employer _____

Local Government _____

State Government _____

Commonwealth
Government _____

Other
(Please specify) _____

7. Is your TOTAL enterprise—

Local _____

Statewide _____

National _____

International _____

8. Is THIS SECTION of your enterprise—

Head Office

Department

Branch

Other

(please specify)

NOTE: PLEASE ANSWER ALL THE REMAINING QUESTIONS AS THEY RELATE TO THIS SECTION OF YOUR ENTERPRISE, WHETHER HEAD OFFICE, BRANCH, DEPARTMENT OR SINGLE ENTERPRISE.

9. Do you carry out your own recruitment of staff?

Yes

No

If NO, which section of your enterprise is responsible for recruitment?

10. What is the TOTAL number of employees in THIS SECTION of your enterprise?

10 or less

51-100

11-20

101-200

21-50

More than 200

11. Does your enterprise provide schools with career information?

Yes

No

If Yes, how is this done?

(Tick more than one category if necessary.)

Provision of visiting speakers

Visits by students to your enterprise

Written publicity material —
job pamphlets, etc.

Other

Films, tapes, etc.

(Please specify)

12. Is your enterprise at present taking part in work-experience programmes for students? (e.g. students work for one or two weeks while still at school.)

Yes

No

If No, would your enterprise be willing to take part in such programmes?

Yes

No

13. Are SCHOOL LEAVERS CURRENTLY employed in THIS SECTION of your enterprise?

Yes

No

If YES, please continue with Sections B and C (green), Questions 14-39.

If NO, please proceed to Section D (pink), Questions 40-44.

SECTION B

(To be completed by enterprises in which school leavers ARE currently employed)

14. Which positions in THIS SECTION of the enterprise are currently filled by SCHOOL LEAVERS? Please list these below, stating the MINIMUM EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS required for each position, any SPECIAL SKILLS necessary, the type of JOB TRAINING provided and any ASSISTANCE offered for FURTHER STUDY.

Please make any additional comments you wish.

POSITION	MINIMUM EDUCATIONAL STANDARD	SPECIAL SKILLS	JOB TRAINING PROVIDED	ASSISTANCE FOR FURTHER STUDY	NUMBER EMPLOYED	
					Male	Female
	(If specific subjects and levels required, please state these) (a) No specified minimum. (b) Achievement Certificate (Completion of Year 10). (c) Completion of Year 11. (d) Tertiary Admissions Examination (Completion of Year 12). (e) Other (please specify).	e.g. Typing	(Indicate more than one category if necessary) (a) Planned on-the-job. (b) On-the-job (No specific planning). (c) Courses run by your organisation. (d) External Courses (e.g. Technical education). (e) No training provided. (f) Other (please specify).	(Indicate more than one category if necessary) (a) Time off with pay. (b) Time off without pay. (c) Payment of fees. (d) Pay loading for higher qualifications. (e) Cadetship. (f) Verbal encouragement. (g) No assistance given. (h) Other (please specify).		
EXAMPLE Clerk	(b) English — Intermediate Mathematics — Elementary		(a)	(a) and (c)	5	7

Please continue on the back of this page.

POSITION	MINIMUM EDUCATIONAL STANDARD	SPECIAL SKILLS	JOB TRAINING PROVIDED	ASSISTANCE FOR FURTHER STUDY	NUMBER EMPLOYED	
					Male	Female

15. How do the numbers of school leavers currently employed compare with the last two years?

More school leavers currently employed

Fewer school leavers currently employed

No significant change in numbers

Comments:

16. Do you prefer school leavers from ---

Government schools

Other independent schools

Catholic schools

No preference

Comments:

17. Do you have any positions for school leavers which are difficult to fill?

Yes

No

If Yes, which positions are these and why are they difficult to fill?

18. How are school leavers selected for employment? If a specific entry test, examination, or aptitude test battery is used, please give details.

19. What are three major areas of improvement needed by school leavers applying for positions with you?

1.

2.

3.

20. On the whole, what are the overall qualities you look for in school leaver applicants?

21. In the last twelve months, have any school leavers had their employment terminated?

Yes

No

If Yes, what was the most common reason for this?

22. Does THIS SECTION of your enterprise employ Personnel Officer(s)?

Yes

No

23. Does THIS SECTION of your enterprise employ Training Officer(s)?

Yes No

24. Is on-the-job counselling (personal or work-related) provided for school leaver employees?

Yes No

If Yes, who carries this out and what form does this take?

Please continue with Section C.

SECTION C

(To be completed by enterprises in which school leavers ARE currently employed)

This section is seeking views on how well school leavers are meeting the needs of employers and what might be done to improve preparation of students for employment.

Please make any additional comments you wish.

25. How well do the school leavers you employ meet your requirements?

Very well

Not very well

Adequately

Poorly

26. To what extent do schools give adequate attention to the preparation of students for employment?

Don't know

Too little

About right

Too much

Comments:

27. How would you rate your familiarity with the types of courses offered by schools?

Very familiar

Quite familiar

Not very familiar

28. What changes (if any) would you like to see in the content/emphasis of teaching in the schools?

29. How satisfied are you with current methods of school assessment and reporting?

Very satisfied

Satisfied

Not very satisfied

30. What changes (if any) would you like to see in current methods of school assessment and reporting?

31. In which areas (knowledge, skills, attitudes) are the schools—

(a) most effective in preparing young people for employment with you?

(b) least effective in preparing young people for employment with you?

32. What do you consider to be—

(a) the major advantages (if any) in employing school leavers?

(b) the major disadvantages (if any) in employing school leavers?

33. To what extent do you think that employers should be consulted in educational planning? How should this be done?

34. Can you suggest any other ways in which employers could assist schools in preparing students for employment?

35. In general, how would you rate school leavers of today compared with those of about 5 years ago in terms of

	Significantly Better	Better	About the same	Worse	Significantly Worse	Don't Know
(a) Literacy (Reading, writing, spelling)						
(b) Numeracy (Number skills)						
(c) Other job-related skills						
(d) Attitude to the job						

Comments:

36. Below is a list of skills and personal attributes which might be considered important for school leavers entering employment.

Please tick in COLUMN 1 how IMPORTANT each item is for school leavers employed by your organisation, and in COLUMN 2 how often each seems to be a PROBLEM with school leavers currently or recently employed.

Please answer this question as it applies to the position occupied by the majority of school leavers as indicated in your response to question 14.

School leaver position

Skill or Personal attribute	COLUMN 1			COLUMN 2		
	How IMPORTANT for the job			How often a PROBLEM with school leavers employed.		
	Very important	Moderately important	Not very important	Often a problem	Sometimes a problem	Seldom a problem
(a) Reading.						
(b) Written communication—handwriting, simple letter or report-writing, spelling, grammar, etc.						
(c) Oral communication—speech, use of telephone, message-taking, etc.						
(d) Number skills—including arithmetic, calculations, etc.						
(e) Practical skills—including manual dexterity, orderly handling of tools, equipment, paper-work, etc.						
(f) Initiative, self-confidence and the ability to work without supervision.						
(g) Ability to work with and be considerate of others.						
(h) Sense of responsibility; respect for authority, loyalty to the employer.						
(i) Punctuality, diligence.						
(j) Acceptable standards of dress, appearance and hygiene.						

37. Are there any other particular skills or attributes which are important for school leavers you employ ?

38. Are there any other particular skills or attributes which appear as problems with school leavers you employ?

39. Any other comments?

Thank you for your co-operation and assistance in this survey.

Please return the questionnaire in the envelope provided.

SECTION D.

(To be completed only by enterprises NOT currently employing school leavers)

40. (a) Why are school leavers not employed currently?
(Tick more than one category if necessary.)

No suitable jobs

Too expensive

No suitable applicants

Unstable (change jobs frequently)

School leavers have proved unsuitable in the past

Unrealistic job expectations

Prefer employees with some experience

Policy matter

Too immature

Other

(Please specify)

Comments:

- (b) If your response was "no suitable applicants", to which positions does this apply?

- (c) Why is recruitment for these positions difficult?

41. Have school leavers been employed during the last 5 years?

Yes No

If Yes, how satisfactory were they?

Very satisfactory Satisfactory Not very satisfactory

42. Are school leavers likely to be employed in the next two or three years?

Yes No

If Yes, in what areas or jobs?

43. What do you consider to be

(a) the major advantages (if any) in employing school leavers?

(b) the major disadvantages (if any) in employing school leavers?

44. Any other comments?

Thank you for your co-operation and assistance in this survey.

Please return the questionnaire in the envelope provided.

EMPLOYER SURVEY

SCHOOL LEAVERS

1. Name of firm/employer
- Telephone number
2. Section/branch
 (if relevant)
3. Type of firm/employer
4. Name/position of respondent
5. What is the TOTAL number of people working for this firm/employer?

Number

Full-time

Part-time
6. Are SCHOOL LEAVERS currently employed?

Yes

No

If Yes, continue with question 7 onwards.
 If No, move to question 15.
7. In which positions are school leavers employed?

<u>Position</u>	<u>Minimum Ed.</u>	<u>Special</u>	<u>Job</u>	<u>Number</u>		
	<u>Standard</u>	<u>Skills</u>	<u>Training</u>		Male	Female
8. How satisfied are you with the school leavers you employ?
 Comments :
9. On the whole, what are the overall qualities you look for in school leaver applicants?
10. Do you have any positions for school leavers which are difficult to fill?

Yes

No

If Yes, which positions are these and why are they difficult to fill?
11. What changes (if any) would you like to see in the content/emphasis of emphasis of teaching in the schools?
12. What do you consider to be
 - (a) the major advantages in employing school leavers?
 - (b) the major disadvantages in employing school leavers?

13. In general, how would you rate school leavers of today compared with those of about 5 years ago in terms of

Significantly Better	Better	About the same	Worse	Significantly Worse	Don't know
-------------------------	--------	-------------------	-------	------------------------	---------------

- (a) Literacy
- (b) Numeracy
- (c) Attitude to
the job

14. Any other comments?

(Employers NOT currently employing school leavers)

15. (a) Why are school leavers not employed currently
(Tick more than one category if necessary.)

No suitable jobs	()
No suitable applicants	()
School leavers have proved unsuitable in the past	()
Prefer employees with some experience	()
Too immature	()
Too expensive	()
Unstable (change jobs frequently)	()
Unrealistic job expectations	()
Policy matter	()
Other	()
(please specify)	

Comments:

- (b) If your response was 'no suitable applicants', to which positions does this apply?
- (c) Why is recruitment for these positions difficult?

16. Have school leavers been employed during the last 5 years?

Yes () No ()

If Yes, how satisfactory were they?

Very satisfactory () Satisfactory () Not very satisfactory ()

17. Are school leavers likely to be employed in the next two or three years?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If Yes, in what areas or jobs?

18. What do you consider to be

(a) the major advantages (if any) in employing school leavers?

(b) the major disadvantages (if any) in employing school leavers?

19. Any other comments?

APPENDIX 3

DEVELOPMENT OF SURVEY INSTRUMENTS. SAMPLE DETAILS, DATA COLLECTION

Development of Survey Instruments

It was decided that a questionnaire should be designed to obtain the views of employers in medium to large enterprises, while the views of smaller employer bodies would be more appropriately obtained by personal interview.

Preliminary investigation

Prior to commencing the design of the questionnaire, contact was made with representatives of a number of key organizations to obtain their opinions on the important questions to be asked. Among those contacted were:-

- (a) Confederation of W.A. Industry (Inc.) and W.A. Chamber of Manufactures.

These two major employer associations made available copies of several confidential documents they had prepared, including:

- Education Policy
- Priority Matters in Education Policy
- Submission to the Committee of Enquiry on Post-Secondary Education in W.A.
- Report to the Central Industrial Secretariat
- Submission to the Commonwealth Inquiry into Education and Training.

Discussions were held with the Executive Director of the Confederation of W.A. Industry (Inc.), the Director of the Labour Relations Division of the Confederation, and the Director of the W.A. Chamber of Manufacturers.

- (b) Perth Chamber of Commerce
- (c) Youth Employment Section, Department of Employment and Industrial Relations
- (d) Public Service Board - State Government
- (e) Public Service Board - Commonwealth Government
- (f) Trades and Labour Council
- (g) Board of Secondary Education
- (h) W.A. Institute of Personnel Management

A copy of the Submission to ~~the~~ ^{the} Inquiry into Education and

Training by the Institute of Personnel Management; Australia was made available.

In addition to the above, letters were written to a number of people and organizations requesting information on similar or related research.

These included:

Research Branch and Guidance Branch of each State Education Department
Department of Labour in each state
Employers' Federation and Chamber of Manufacturers in each state
Australian Council for Educational Research
Commonwealth Department of Education
Commonwealth Department of Employment and Industrial Relations
National Foundation for Educational research in England and Wales
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
New Zealand Council for Educational Research

Response to these letters indicated that while the problem of transition from school to work were generally considered to be of vital importance, no large scale survey of employers views of school leavers appeared to have been undertaken.

Development of the Questionnaire

From the information obtained in the preliminary investigation and search of the literature, the following emerged as important areas to be probed.

(i) *School leavers*

- (a) Educational factors - including standards of literacy and numeracy.
- (b) Personal factors - e.g. general attitude, standards of dress and personal appearance, factors such as diligence, initiative etc.
- (c) Vocational factors - e.g. preparation for employment interviews, understanding of responsibilities on taking up employment etc.

(ii) *Schooling*

Methods of assessment and reporting; general vocational preparation of students; content/emphasis of teaching in the schools; consultation with employers in educational planning.

(iii) *Employers*

Information to be able to classify employers on variables such as size, main purpose, whether school leavers are or are not employed; details of positions currently filled by school leavers.

Pilot Test of Questionnaire

Because of limitations of time, it was not possible to arrange a full pilot test of the questionnaire. However, a preliminary version of the questionnaire was discussed in detail with several major employers representing the private and public sector, to check any possible misunderstandings or omission of important questions.

A few minor changes were made on the basis of these discussions.

Final Version of the Questionnaire

The final version of the questionnaire is shown in Appendix 1. It consists of four sections.

- Section A : to be completed by all enterprises
- Section B and C: to be completed by those enterprises in which school leavers are currently employed.
- Section D : to be completed by those enterprises in which school leavers are not currently employed.

Details of Sections

Section A - Questions seeking general background information about the employer enterprise.

Section B - Questions seeking details of positions occupied by school leavers, minimum educational qualifications required for each, any special skills necessary, the type of job training provided, any assistance offered for further study and the number employed in each school leaver position. Other questions relate to methods of selection, overall qualities looked for, major areas of importance needed by school leaver applicants etc.

Section C - Questions seeking views on how well school leavers are meeting the needs of employers, what might be done to improve preparation of students for employment, advantages and disadvantages of employing school leavers, and school leavers of today rated in comparison to those of about 5 years ago.

Also employers were given a list of skills and personal attributes and asked to indicate a) how important and b) how often each appeared to be a problem with school leavers currently or recently employed.

Section D - Questions asking why school leavers are not currently employed; whether school leavers had been employed in the past or are likely to be employed in the future, and views on advantages and disadvantages of employing school leavers.

Interview Schedule

A shortened version of the questionnaire was used as an interview schedule for the 'smaller' employers. The interview schedule is shown in Appendix 2.

The Sample

Estimate of school leavers and distribution in the workforce in 1976/77

In order to select a representative sample of employers it was necessary to identify the major areas of the workforce into which school leavers go. This was not an easy task. Statistics are kept by individual Departments, such as the State Department of Labour, Commonwealth Employment Service, etc., but it was difficult to obtain information on the whole school leaver population. Even the Australian Bureau of Statistics was unable to assist with the specific information required. While a study entitled "School Leavers, 1970 to 1974: Their Employment Status and Education Experience in May 1975", was carried out (A.B.S. Reference No: 6.53), a breakdown of figures for W.A. was not available.

The most up to date information was found in a study by the Manpower Research and Information Branch, Perth Regional Office, Department of Employment and Industrial Relations. This was prepared in December 1976 and entitled: "Annual Distribution Estimate of School Leavers Entering the Workforce in Western Australia, 1976/1977".¹⁸ The chart from page 1 of this report is reproduced below.

PART I : ESTIMATE OF SCHOOL LEAVERS AND DISTRIBUTION IN THE WORKFORCE IN
1976/77 (LABOUR SUPPLY).

1 CHART 1976/77

		Males	Females	Total		
i	SCHOOL LEAVERS					
a	School leavers from Govt and non Govt schools	10554	10272	20826		
b	Technical College Leavers : Leaving and Matric Courses only	108	86	194		
	Total School Leavers	10662	10358	21020		
ii	TO FURTHER FULL-TIME EDUCATION					
a	Tertiary Education Institutions	1889	1809	3698		
b	Technical Colleges (excl. Leaving and Matric Courses)	576	843	1419		
c	Business Colleges	3	792	795		
	Total to Further Full-Time Education	2468	3444	5912		
	Not to Further Full-Time Education	8194	6914	15108		
iii	ENTERING WORKFORCE					
	95% of M 92% of F	7784	6361	14145		
iv	DISTRIBUTION OF SCHOOL LEAVERS ENTERING WORKFORCE					
		<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>T</u>
a	Rural Workers	11%	1%	847	65	912
b	Apprentices	38%	10%	2974	626	3600
c	Unskilled Workers	23%	3%	1790	191	1981
d	Clerical Workers	14%	44%	1080	2826	3906
e	Sales Workers	8%	21%	617	1349	1966
f	Workers in Transport and Comm.	3%	1%	232	65	297
g	Service Workers	2%	7%	156	445	601
h	Nursing Trainees (incl. Aides)	1%	13%	88	794	882
		<u>100%</u>	<u>100%</u>			
	Total School Leavers Entering Workforce			7784	6361	14145

Employer Sample

Focussing on the relevant parts of section iv of the above chart, the following was used as a guide in selecting a representative sample of employers. The target sample size was 400.

DISTRIBUTION OF SCHOOL LEAVERS ENTERING THE WORKFORCE

	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Total %</u>
b. Apprentices	2974	626	3600	31.4%
c. Unskilled workers	1790	191	1981	17.3%
d. Clerical Workers	1080	2826	3906	34.1%
e. Sales workers	617	1349	1966	17.2%

Complete details on employers of apprentices were provided by the State Department of Labour. Random selection was carried out from those employing at least six apprentices, in order to keep within the guidelines of surveying medium to large enterprises.

For the remaining three categories, selection of private employers was carried out using information from the Western Australian Manufacturers Directory; List of Members of the Perth Chamber of Commerce (Inc.), a list of major employers of school leavers provided by the Commonwealth Employment Service.

Selection of State, Commonwealth and Local Government departments was made using information on those most likely to employ school leavers.

While it was not possible to know in advance the proportion of clerical, sales or unskilled positions held by school leavers in the enterprises selected in the sample, from the information available about the particular private employers selected, and knowledge of the types of position available in the various Government enterprises, a distribution approximating that of school leavers in the workforce was expected.

The initial employer sample was as below.

EMPLOYER SAMPLE

Private employers	350
State Government	42
Commonwealth Government	29
Local Government	6
'Other'	<u>13</u>
Total	<u>440</u>

Practical Constraints(i) *Geographic spread*

The employer sample was restricted to the Perth metropolitan area. For country areas to be included, a greatly increased sample size would be necessary to allow for non-respondents, and follow-up would only be feasible by mail. Perhaps more importantly, it was considered that there could be many problems and issues specific to country areas. Therefore it was decided that a separate non-metropolitan survey was warranted, but was not within the scope of the present project.

(ii) *Sample representativeness*

The sample of employers to be surveyed by questionnaire was deliberately biased in favour of medium to large enterprises as once again, to be representative of small employers would have necessitated a much larger sample. However, the views of smaller employers were sought by personal interview.

It also seems likely that the sample is biased towards the views of the Head Office of the various enterprises. This is particularly so in the retail field. While preliminary inquiries had shown that branches of retail stores were responsible for their own recruitment and selection of school leaver employees, the Head Office of these retail stores indicated that they preferred to give an overall view rather than allowing individual branches to comment.

(iii) *Response rate*

The initial employer sample size was 440. However, with the constraint mentioned above of a number of retail branch stores being unable to provide information (38) and several employers in the initial sample who were no longer at the given address, or had ceased to operate, the final sample size was 384 enterprises.

By the pre-determined cut-off date, 284 out of the possible 384 questionnaires had been returned. Thus a final response rate of 74% was achieved. This was considered satisfactory and is considerably higher than more typical response rates of 25-30% reported for mail surveys.

(iv) *Non-respondents*

Of the 100 employers not responding to the survey, the majority (92%) were private employers. All of the employers who had not completed and returned the questionnaire by the pre-determined date were followed up by telephone, some more than once. 30% of these did not return the questionnaire even though they promised to do so on the telephone, and a further 15% claimed that they had no record of having received the questionnaire. 10% were certain that they had returned the questionnaire but there was no record of this. Several declined to participate, without giving any particular reason; several felt that they were too busy and would not have time; in a few cases the Manager was away, and a small number commented that there are far too many surveys being conducted anyway.

There is no way of knowing how similar or otherwise the views of these non-responding employers would be. Nevertheless, as the non-respondents represented a wide range of industries and included small, medium and large enterprises, it seems reasonable to assume that the views of the 284 employers who responded are representative of the sample as a whole.

Data Collection

Questionnaire

On 4th August 1977, a letter was sent out in advance to all the employers in the sample advising them about the project and requesting their cooperation. A copy of the letter is in Appendix 1.

On 16th August, the questionnaire, guide sheet on how to complete the questionnaire and a stamped addressed envelope were sent. It was requested that the questionnaire be completed and returned by September 9th.

At this time, about 35% of the questionnaires had been returned.

Follow-up was carried out by telephoning each of the non-responding employers. This was time-consuming but considered more likely to produce a response than a follow-up letter.

In the course of the follow-up procedure, some information was obtained on employers views. A few employers who were reluctant to complete the questionnaire indicated that they would be willing to be interviewed, and this was arranged.

Taking these into account, and a small number of employers in the sample who were no longer at the given address, or had gone out of business, the final sample size was 384.

By September 30th, the pre-determined cut-off date, 284 questionnaires had been returned out of the possible 384. Thus a final response rate of 74% was achieved, as mentioned before.

Interviews

In order to obtain the views of a number of "small" employers, two major shopping centres were visited by the project officer and two research assistants. The two shopping centres selected were Bentley, La Plaza; and Claremont, including Bay View Terrace.

A shortened version of the questionnaire was used as an interview schedule (see Appendix 2). Approximately 70 employers were interviewed, covering a wide range of different types of small retail stores. Full details of the employer sample are given in the Results section of this report.

70 was considered a sufficient number to interview as little new information was being provided beyond the first 40 interviews. While most of the employers interviewed were very cooperative, many felt that they were not in a position to give comprehensive views because of limited experience with school leavers.

The employers from the original sample who indicated preference for personal discussion were also interviewed. This ensured that opinions were being obtained at the "grass roots" level. It is interesting to note that a few of the employers who said that they were too busy to complete the questionnaire were happy to spend up to one hour discussing the relevant issues.

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